

James Watson,
Rio Vista.

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California

THE IRON MASK.

"FOURTH SERIES" OF "THE THREE GUARDSMEN."

BY ALEXANDER DUMAS.

AUTHOR OF "COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO," "THE THREE GUARDSMEN," "THE CONSCRIPT,"
"TWENTY YEARS AFTER," "THE TWIN LIEUTENANTS," "MAN WITH FIVE WIVES,"
"THE BLACK TULIP," "MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN," "MARRIAGE VERDICT,"
"CAMILLE; OR, FATE OF A COQUETTE," "THE CHEVALIER," "BRAGELONNE,"
"QUEEN'S NECKLACE," "DIANA OF MERIDOR," "LOUISE LA VALLIERE,"
"GEORGE; OR, PLANTER OF ISLE OF FRANCE," "MOHICANS OF PARIS,"
"ADVENTURES OF A MARQUIS," "THE COUNTESS OF CHARNY,"
"FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN," "ANNETTE," "BURIED ALIVE,"
"THE CORSICAN BROTHERS," "FELINA DE CHAMBURE,"
"SKETCHES IN FRANCE," "ANDREE DE TAVERNEY,"
"THE COUNT OF MORET," "ISABEL OF BAVARIA,"
"THE FALLEN ANGEL," "SIX YEARS LATER,"
"HORRORS OF PARIS," "EDMOND DANTES,"
"LOVE AND LIBERTY," "IRON HAND."

77

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE French Revolution, which astounded all the world in February, 1848, had the disastrous effect of arresting the labours of many literary men; the newspapers in which some of them were published had been discontinued; the works of Alexandre Dumas, in particular, were suspended for a long period. For many months the most prolific and most powerful novel writer of the age was compelled to lay aside the pen of fiction, and occupy himself with the startling realities of that eventful period. It was at one time feared that Dumas, having once entered the political arena, would altogether abandon his unfinished works; works which had afforded so much delight, so much amusement, so much instruction, even, to the world.

The interest excited by that great series of novels, beginning with the "Three Guardsmen," and continued by "Twenty Years After," and the "Viscount de Bragelonne," was so intense that the public urgently called for its conclusion, and under these circumstances it was brought to a temporary close. The promotion of d'Artagnan to the rank of Captain of the Mousquetaires, one of the highest dignities in France, was considered the proper point at which to pause.

Since that time Dumas has resumed his favourite work, and which all agree in pronouncing his *chef-d'œuvre*, and he has for some months past been occupied in completing this sequel to the "Three Guardsmen," "Twenty Years After," and "Bragelonne." The scenes which were but

merely sketched in the hasty conclusion, he has elaborated with his usual skill; it is a work possessing more interest than any other he has ever written. Our old friends, d'Artagnan, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos, are still its leading characters, while many new ones are introduced, throwing much light upon the history of those times, and the intrigues of the French Court during the early part of the reign of Louis XIV. That mystery which had puzzled the world during nearly two centuries, "The Prisoner in the Iron Mask," is completely solved, and in a manner so powerful, interesting, and ingenious, that this episode of itself renders the work invaluable.

THE IRON MASK;

OR, THE

FEATS AND ADVENTURES OF RAOUL DE BRAGELONNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE COURT YARD OF THE HOTEL GRAMMONT.

THE marriage of Monsieur, the brother of Louis XIV. with the Princess Henrietta of England, sister to Charles II. was hailed by both nations as an event that promised a continuance of peace and kindly feeling. The preparations for the ceremony had all been made in Paris and a numerous cortege of young nobility had been appointed to receive the princess on her landing at Havre and to escort her to the capital.

At the head of this assemblage of the flower of the French nobility was the young and handsome Count de Guiche, son of the celebrated Marshal de Grammont.

The Count de Guiche was in the court-yard of his hotel, preparing for his departure, when Malicorne, but lately arrived in Paris presented himself at the gate, and on pronouncing the name of Manicamp was instantly admitted.

The count, who was examining his equipages, which his servants were passing in review before him, the count either blamed or praised as the case might be, the clothing, horses, and harness which had been brought to him, when suddenly on hearing Manicamp's name. "Manicamp," he cried, "let him come in, let him come in."

And he advanced a few steps towards the gate.

Malicorne stooped in through the half-opened gate and perceiving that

the count looked at him with some surprise.

"Your pardon, my lord count," said he, "but I believe the porter has made some mistake, he announced to you Manicamp himself whereas I mentioned his name only as my friend."

"Ah! Mr. Malicorne, I recollect, but where is Manicamp, will he not be at Havre?"

"He will go across the country, in order to be there in time."

"Sir," said the count bowing, "you appear to be a man of taste."

Malicorne had on a suit of Manicamp's clothes.

Malicorne bowed in his turn.

"You do me great honor, sir," said he.

"Monsieur de Malicorne," said the count, "what think you of the holsters of these pistols?"

Malicorne was a man of great quickness of perception. Besides which the *de* placed thus before his name, had raised him to an equality with the person who addressed him.

He examined the holsters as a connoisseur, and without hesitation, replied,

"Rather heavy, sir."

"There, you see," said Guiche to the saddler, "this gentleman, who is a man of taste, thinks your holsters heavy. Did I not tell you so, just now?"

The saddler made all sorts of excuses.

"And this horse, what think you of him?" inquired De Guiche. "I have only just purchased him."

"At sight, I should call him perfect, my lord count, but I must mount him to give you my opinion of him."

"Well, mount him, Monsieur de Malicorne, and let him take two or three turns round the riding school."

The court-yard of the hotel, was, in fact, arranged in such a manner as to serve for a riding-school in case of need.

Malicorne, without the least embarrassment, gathered up the reins, seized hold of the horse's mane with his left hand, placed his foot in the stirrup and vaulted into the saddle.

He made the horse go the first round at a foot pace.

The second at a trot.

And the third at a gallop.

Then pulling up close to the count's side, he alighted, throwing the bridle to a groom.

"Well," said the count, "what think you of the horse, Monsieur de Malicorne?"

"My lord," replied Malicorne, "he is of the Mecklenburgh breed. On looking at the bit, to see whether it suited his mouth, I observed that he was rising seven years old, a good age to train a charger. His forehead is light. A flat headed horse never fatigues the rider's hand. His withers are rather low. From his hind quarters I should suspect that he is not altogether of German blood; there must be some cross with the English. He is straight enough upon his posterns, but he hammers in trotting; he must cut, attention therefore to his shoeing. He is, however, very handy. I found him very clever in changing paces, and light mouthed.

"Well judged, Monsieur de Malicorne," cried the count; "you are a connoisseur."

Then turning towards the new comer:

"Your coat is a very elegant one," said Guiche to Malicorne, "it was not made in the country, I presume; they cannot cut one of that fashion in Tours or Orleans."

"No, my lord, this coat, as you surmise, was made in Paris."

"Oh! that is easily perceived. But let us now think of your affairs. Manicamp wishes to make another maid of honor."

"You saw what he wrote to you?"

"Let us see; what was the name of the first?"

Malicorne felt the blood rising to his face.

"A charming maid of honor," he hastened to reply. "Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah! ah! you know her, sir?"

"Yes, she is my betrothed, or nearly so."

"That is another affair—a thousand compliments!" cried Guiche, upon whose lips was already floating a courtly jest, which was restrained by the title of betrothed given by Malicorne to Mademoiselle de Montalais. "But who is this Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière, is she the betrothed of Manicamp? In that case I pity her. Poor girl; she would have a sorry fellow for a husband."

"No, my lord count, it is not so."

"Is she of good family?"

"Of an excellent house, and maid of honor to the duchess dowager of Orleans."

"Very well. I will at once go to Monsieur about it. Will you come with me?"

"But there is the other affair, my lord."

"What is that?"

"A commission for myself in the household of Monsieur."

"Ah! yes; but why did you not speak of that at once, my dear Monsieur de Mauvaiseconne?"

"Malicorne!"

"Ah! I beg your pardon; it was the Latin which confused me; the frightful habit of seeking etymologies. Why the deuce do they compel young men of family to study Latin. *Mala, mauvaise* You understand it means precisely the same thing. You will pardon me, will you not Monsieur de Malicorne?"

"Your kindness touches me, sir, but that is a reason for my at once apprising you—"

"Of what?"

"That I am not of noble family; I have a good heart, some little talent, and my name is Malicorne without any addition.

The Count de Guiche gazed at the intellectual and somewhat roguish features of his interlocutor.

"Well!" cried he, "you have all the appearance of an amiable man. I like your face, Monsieur Malicorne: you must have furiously good qualities, to have pleased that egotist, Manicamp. Be candid, now; are you not some saint descended upon earth?"

"And why so?"

"Egad! because he gives you something. Did you not tell me that he wished to make you a gift of an office in Monsieur's household?"

"Your pardon, count: if I obtain the appointment, it will not be Mani-

camp who will have given it me, but yourself."

"And besides, he perhaps will not have given it altogether for nothing."

"Oh! my lord—"

"Stop a minute: why, there is a Malicorne at Orleans. By heaven! that is he who lends money to Monsieur le Prince."*

"I believe that is my father, sir."

"Ah! there it is. Monsieur le Prince has the father, and that frightful devourer, Manicamp, has the son. Beware, sir, for I know him; he will devour you, by heaven! even to the bones."

"Only that I lend without interest, sir," replied Malicorne, smiling.

"I spoke truly when I said you were a saint, or something approaching it. Monsieur Malicorne, you shall have your appointment, or my name is not Guiche."

"Oh! my lord count, I cannot express my gratitude," cried Malicorne, transported.

"Let us go to the prince, my dear Monsieur Malicorne, let us go to the prince."

And De Guiche walked towards the gate, making a sign to Malicorne to follow him.

But at the moment they were passing it, a young man was coming in.

He was a cavalier twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, with a pale face, thin lips, brilliant eyes, his hair and eye brows of a dark-brown hue.

"Ah! good morning," said he, suddenly, and, as it were, pushing De Guiche back into the court-yard.

"Ah! ah! You here, De Wardes! You, booted, spurred, and a whip in your hand!"

"It is the equipment which befits a man who is setting out for Havre. Tomorrow there will not be a soul left in Paris."

"Monsieur Malicorne," said Guiche to his friend.

De Wardes bowed.

"Monsieur de Wardes," said Guiche to Malicorne.

Malicorne bowed in his turn.

"Come, now, De Wardes," continued Guiche, "tell us, you who know every thing, tell us what appointments there are to be given away at court—or rather, I should say, in Monsieur's household."

"In the household of Monsieur," said De Wardes, raising his eyes in the

air, as if trying to remember; "let me see—ah! yes—there is that of grand equerry, I believe."

"Oh!" cried Malicorne, "do not let us talk of such offices as that; my ambition rises not to one-fourth such a height."

Wardes' disposition was habitually more distrustful than that of Guiche; he immediately divined Malicorne.

"The fact is," said he, eyeing him from head to foot, "that in order to obtain that place, a man must be duke and peer."

"All that I ask for," said Malicorne, "is some very humble office; I am but little, and do not estimate myself above what I am."

"Monsieur Malicorne, whom you see," said Guiche to De Wardes, "is a young man of talent, whose only misfortune is the not being a nobleman. But, as you know, I have no great consideration for a man who is merely a nobleman."

"Agreed," said De Wardes, "but I would merely observe to you, my dear count, that without some nobility a man cannot reasonably hope to be admitted into Monsieur's household."

"That is true!" said the count. "In this the etiquette is formal. The deuse! the deuse! we had not thought of that."

"Alas! that is a serious misfortune for me," said Malicorne, turning slightly pale; a very great misfortune, my lord count."

"But one that can be remedied, I trust," replied De Guiche.

"Zounds! I believe so indeed," cried De Wardes; "the remedy is already found: they will make a nobleman of you in a trice, my dear sir. His Eminence, the late Cardinal Mazarin, did nothing else from morning till night."

"Peace! peace! De Wardes," said the count; "a truce to your sarcastic jests; it is not for us to utter such jokes as these. Nobility may be bought, that is true; but it is too great a misfortune that it should be so, for nobles to laugh at it."

"In good truth, you are a 'rigid Puritan,' as the English say."

"The Viscount de Bragelonne," cried a valet in the court-yard, as if he had been announcing him in a drawing-room.

"Ah! dear Raoul," cried De Guiche, "come here, come here; already booted, too! and your spurs on, also. You are going, then?"

Bragelonne approached the group

* The Prince de Condé was always called "Monsieur le Prince."

of young men, and bowed with that serious, mild air which was peculiar to him. His bow was particularly addressed to De Wardes, whom he did not know, and whose features had assumed a singular air of coldness, on seeing Raoul appear.

"My friend," said the latter to De Guiche, "I come to ask you for your company. We are going to Havre, I presume."

"Ah! nothing could be better! this is delightful! What a charming journey we shall have! Monsieur Malicorne, Monsieur Bragelonne. Ah! M. de Wardes, let me present you."

The young men exchanged a ceremonious salute. Their two natures, at the very onset, appeared to be repellant to each other. De Wardes was supple, cunning, dissembling; Raoul, grave, high-minded, and straight-forward.

"You must make De Wardes and me agree, Raoul."

"And on what subject?"

"With regard to nobility."

"Who can understand that question better than a Grammont?"

"I ask you not for compliments, dear Raoul, I ask for your opinion."

"For that I must be informed of the subject in discussion."

"De Wardes pretends that great abuse is made in lavishing titles—I pretend that a title is useless to a man."

"And you are right," calmly replied Bragelonne.

"And I also," said De Wardes, with some degree of obstinacy, "I also pretend, Viscount, that I am in the right."

"And what had you said, sir?"

"I said that they were doing all they could in France to humiliate the nobility."

"And who is doing this?" inquired Raoul.

"The King himself, he surrounds himself with people who could not even give proof of four quarterings in their arms."

"You are jesting, surely," said De Guiche, "I cannot imagine in what you have seen this, De Wardes."

"I will give you a single example."

And De Wardes gazed earnestly and fixedly at Bragelonne.

"Speak on."

"Do you know who has just been appointed captain-general of the mousquetaires, an office which is higher than any peerage, an office which gives precedence over the marshals of France?"

Raoul began to color, for he divined what De Wardes was aiming at.

"No: who has been appointed? It cannot have been long ago, that is certain; for not a week since the place was still vacant, and of this I am assured for the King refused it to Monsieur, who had applied for it on behalf of one of his protégés."

"Well, my dear count, the King refused it to Monsieur in order to give it to the Chevalier d'Artagnan, a younger son of a Gascon family, who for thirty years has been trailing his sword in the ante-chambers."

"You will pardon my interrupting you, sir," cried Raoul, darting a severe look at De Wardes, "but it would appear to me, you do not know the person of whom you are speaking."

"Not know M. d'Artagnan! and who does not know him?"

"Those who know him, sir," rejoined Raoul, more calmly and more coldly, "are bound to say of him, that if he be not of as high nobility as the King himself, he is the equal of every king in the world in courage and loyalty. That is my opinion of him, and thank heaven I have known M. d'Artagnan from my earliest childhood."

De Wardes was about to reply, but De Guiche interrupted him.

CHAPTER II.

THE PORTRAIT OF MADAME.

THE discussion was about to become still warmer; this De Guiche at once foresaw.

There was in the look of Bragelonne something instinctively hostile.

In that of De Wardes there was something like calculated aggression.

Without endeavoring to penetrate the various feelings by which his two friends were agitated, Guiche immediately thought of warding off the blow which the one or the other was about to give, or perhaps by both.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we must now separate, as I am about to call upon Monsieur. Let us appoint our place of meeting. You, De Wardes come with me to the Louvre, you, Raoul remain here, master of the house, and as you are the adviser of every thing that is doing here you will give a last examination to all my preparations for the journey."

Raoul gave an assenting nod, as a man who neither seeks nor shrinks from a quarrel, quietly seated himself on a bench in the court-yard.

"'Tis well!" said De Guiche, "remain there Raoul, and tell them to show you the two horses I have just bought. You will give me your opinion of them, for I bought them on the condition of your approval. By-the-by, I have to beg your pardon, for I had forgotten to inquire after the Count de la Fère."

And while uttering these last words he observed De Wardes in order to ascertain the effect the name of Raoul's father would produce on him.

"I thank you," said Raoul, "the Count is in excellent health."

A flash of hatred darted from De Wardes' eyes.

De Guiche did not appear to notice this ill foreboding glance, and going up to Raoul to shake hands with him,

"It is understood, Raoul," said he, "is it not, and you will rejoin us in the court yard of the Palais Royal?"

Then making a sign to De Wardes to follow him, who was balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other.

"We are off," said he, "come, Mr. Malicorne."

This name made Raoul start. It appeared to him that he had before heard that name, but he could not recollect on what occasion.

While he was endeavoring to recall this to his memory, half pensive, half irritated by his conversation with De Wardes, the three young men were walking on towards the Palais Royal, where Monsieur lived.

Malicorne understood two things. The first was that De Guiche and De Wardes had something to say to each other; the second, that he ought not to walk in line with them.

He remained at a short distance behind them.

"Are you mad?" said De Guiche to his companion, when they had proceeded a few steps from the Hotel de Grammont; "you attack M. d'Artagnan, and that in the presence of Raoul!"

"Well! and what then?"

"What mean you by what then?"

"Why, is it forbidden to attack M. d'Artagnan?"

"Do you not know then, that M. d'Artagnan is one fourth of that glorious and redoubtable whole, called the mousquetaires?"

"Be it so; but I do not see why that should prevent me from hating M. d'Artagnan."

"What has he done to you?"

"Oh! to me, nothing."

"Why then should you hate him?"

"Ask that of my father's ghost."

"In truth, my dear De Wardes, you astonish me. M. d'Artagnan is not one of those men who allow inimical feelings to exist, without at once settling the account. Your father too, was on his side, as I have been told, always ready to draw his sword. Now there is no enmity so lasting, but it can be washed out by blood, drawn in a fair and honorable combat."

"What would you, my dear friend? This hatred existed between my father and M. d'Artagnan; when I was but a child he spoke to me of this hatred, and it is a particular legacy he left me, with all his other inheritance."

"And the object of this hatred was M. d'Artagnan alone?"

"Oh! M. d'Artagnan was too much incorporated with his three friends for the overflowings of it not to have fallen upon them; and it is so abundant, believe me, that the others, should occasion offer, will not have to complain that they have not their share."

De Guiche had his eye fixed upon De Wardes; he shuddered on observing the bitter smile of the young man and his livid palor; something like a presentiment thrilled through his mind; he said to himself that the time had gone by for brilliant encounters between gentlemen, but that hatred by overflowing the recesses of the heart instead of expending itself without, was no less hatred; that sometimes a smile was as sinister as a threat, and, in a word, that after the fathers who had hated with their hearts and combatted against each other with their good swords would come their children, who would also hate each other in their hearts, but would only combat by intrigue and treachery.

Now, as it was not Raoul whom he suspected of treachery or intrigue, it was for Raoul that De Guiche trembled.

But while these gloomy thoughts were clouding the brow of De Guiche, De Wardes had regained completely his self-possession.

"Moreover," said he, "I have no personal ill-will towards M. de Bragelonne, I do not know him."

"At all events," observed De Guiche

with some asperity, "there is one thing that I beg you will remember, and that is, that Raoul is my best friend."

De Wardes bowed.

The conversation then dropped, although De Guiche had done all he could to draw his secret from him; but De Wardes had doubtless determined not to say more upon the subject, and he remained impenetrable.

De Guiche promised himself to obtain more satisfaction from Raoul.

While thus conversing they reached the Palais Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of gazers.

The household of Monsieur was awaiting his orders to mount on horseback to escort the ambassadors who were to bring the princess to Paris.

This grand show of horses, arms, and liveries, compensated the people in those days, thanks to their good will and their traditionary respect and attachment to their kings, for the enormous expenses, defrayed by taxes levied on them.

Mazarin had said:

"Let them sing, provided they pay."

Louis XIV. said:

"Let them look."

Sight had taken the place of voice; the people might still look, but they might not sing.

M. De Guiche left De Wardes and Malicorne at the foot of the grand staircase, but as he shared the favor of Monsieur with the Chevalier de Lorraine, who always smiled upon, but cordially hated him, he went straight to Monsieur's apartment.

He found the young prince, who was looking at himself in a mirror, and rouging his cheeks.

In one corner of the cabinet, and upon cushions, was reclining the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had just had his long fair hair curled, with the ringlets of which he was playing, as any woman might have done.

The prince on hearing the door open turned round, and perceiving the count, "Ah! it is you, Guiche," said he, "now come here and tell me the truth."

"I will, monseigneur, you know that is my foible."

"Only conceive, Guiche, this wicked chevalier here has been vexing me."

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

"But how can that be," said Guiche, "it is not usual with the chevalier."

"Well now, only think," continued

the prince, "he pretends that Mademoiselle Henrietta is handsomer as a woman, than I am as a man."

"Take care, monseigneur," replied Guiche, archly knitting his brow, "remember you told me to speak the truth."

"Yes," said Monsieur, almost trembling.

"Well then, you shall have it."

"Do not hurry yourself, Guiche," cried the prince, "you have plenty of time. Look at me attentively, and remember well Madame's features. Moreover, here is her portrait; take it."

And he handed him a miniature beautifully executed.

De Guiche took the portrait and gazed upon it for a considerable time.

"By my faith, monseigneur," cried he, "this is an adorable face."

"But look at me, in my turn, look at me," cried Monsieur, endeavoring to recall to himself the attention of the count, which was completely absorbed by the portrait.

"In truth, 'tis marvellous," murmured Guiche.

"Ah! would it not be said that you had never seen that little girl?"

"I have seen her, monseigneur, that is true; but five years have since elapsed, and there is a wonderful difference between a child twelve years old and a young lady of seventeen."

"In short, your opinion, come now! let us hear."

"My opinion is, that the portrait must be a flattering one."

"Oh! there can be no doubt of that," said the prince triumphantly; "it certainly is. But supposing that it should not be so—give me your opinion."

"Monseigneur, your highness is very fortunate in having so charming a bride."

"Be it so; that is your opinion with regard to her; but as to myself?"

"My opinion is, monseigneur, that you are much too handsome for a man."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst into a loud laugh.

Monsieur comprehended fully the severity which was contained in De Guiche's opinion; he knit his brow.

"I have friends," said he, "who are not over kind."

De Guiche again looked at the portrait, but after some moments reconsidering it, he with an inward struggle returned it to Monsieur.

"Decidedly," said he, "I would ra-

ther look ten times at your Highness, than once more at Madame."

Doubtless the chevalier discovered something mysterious in these words, which were not understood by the prince, for he exclaimed,

"Well then, get married."

Monsieur continued putting on his rouge, and when he had finished he looked again at the portrait, then at himself in the glass, and smiled.

He was undoubtedly well satisfied with the comparison.

"Moreover, it is very kind of you to have come," said he, to Guiche, "I was afraid that you would have gone without coming to say adieu."

"Monseigneur knows me too well to believe I could have committed such an impropriety.

"And, besides, you must have something to request of me before leaving Paris."

"Your highness has rightly guessed, for in fact I have a request to present to you."

"Good! speak then."

The Chevalier de Lorraine became all ears and eyes. It appeared to him that any favor granted to another, was a robbery committed on himself.

And as Guiche hesitated:

"Is it money that you require?" asked the prince, "for in that case you come at a lucky moment, for I am monstrously rich. The Superintendent of Finance, has sent me fifty thousand pistoles."

"I thank your highness; but it is not money I would speak of."

"And of what then? come now let us hear?"

"An appointment for a maid of honor."

"Zounds! Guiche, what a patron you have become," cried the prince disdainfully, "will you never speak to me of any thing but these silly abigails?"

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled. He knew that it was displeasing to Monsieur to patronise ladies.

"Monseigneur," said the count, "it is not I who directly patronise the person of whom I speak, it is one of my friends."

"Ah! that is quite another affair. And what is the name of this protégée of your friend?"

"Mademoiselle de la Baume, le Blanc de la Vallière, already maid of honor to the duchess dowager."

"Oh! fie; a lame girl," cried the

Chevalier de Lorraine, stretching himself upon his cushions.

"A lame girl!" repeated the prince. "Is Madame always to have that before her eyes. No, it would be too dangerous."

The Chevalier de Lorraine laughed outright.

"Chevalier!" cried Guiche, "what you are doing is by no means generous, I am soliciting and you are counteracting me."

"Oh! pardon, count," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, rather uneasy at the tone in which the count had pronounced these words. "Such was not my intention, and in fact, I believe that I have confounded this young lady with another."

"You most assuredly have done so, For I can affirm that you are mistaken."

"Well, let us see; do you feel great interest in this matter, Guiche?" inquired the prince.

"A great interest, Monseigneur."

"Well then, 'tis granted; but ask no more appointments, there are no more places."

"Ah!" cried the chevalier, "already twelve o'clock! that was the hour appointed for the departure."

"Do you drive me away, sir?" demanded Guiche.

"Oh! count, how harshly you treat me this morning!" affectionately observed the chevalier.

"For heaven's sake, count! For heaven's sake, chevalier! do not dispute in this manner; do you not see that it afflicts me?"

"The signature!" cried Guiche.

"Take a commission out of that drawer, and give it to me."

Guiche took the commission with one hand and presented a pen which he had dipped in the ink, to Monsieur.

The prince signed the appointment.

"Here, take it," said he, as he returned it, "but it is on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you shall make it up with the chevalier."

"Willingly," replied Guiche.

And he held out his hand to the chevalier with an indifference that very much resembled contempt.

"Go, count," said the chevalier, without appearing, in any way, to remark the count's disdain; "go, and bring back with you a princess who shall not prove too dissimilar to her portrait."

"Yes, go, and return quickly. By-the-by, who do you take with you?"

"Bragelonne and De Wardes."

"Two brave companions."

"Too brave, indeed," observed the chevalier; "endeavor to bring both of them back with you, count."

"Vile heart!" murmured De Guiche, "he scents out evil every where, and before all."

Then bowing to Monsieur, he left the room.

When he reached the vestibule, he flourished the commission over his head.

Malicorne rushed forward and received it, trembling with joy.

But De Guiche perceived that after having received it he waited for something more.

"Patience, sir, patience!" said he to his client; "but the chevalier was there, and I feared failing altogether if I asked too much at once. Wait, then, till my return. Adieu!"

"Adieu, my lord count. A thousand thanks," said Malicorne.

"But mind you send me Manicamp. By-the-by, sir, is it true that Made-moiselle de la Vallière is lame?"

At the moment he pronounced these words a horse drew up behind him.

He turned round and saw Bragelonne looking very pale; he had that instant entered the court-yard.

The poor lover had heard the question. It was not so with Malicorne, who was already out of hearing.

"Why are they speaking here of Louise?" said Raoul to himself. "Oh! may it never happen that De Wardes, who is smiling yonder, should say a word regarding her in my hearing."

"Come, gentlemen, come, to horse!" cried De Guiche.

At that moment the prince, whose toilette was completed, appeared at the window.

The whole escort saluted him with loud acclamations, and ten minutes afterwards, banners, scarfs and plumes floated in the wind, as the chargers galloped along the quays.

CHAPTER III.

AT HAVRE.

ALL this court, so gay, so brilliant, and animated with such various feelings, arrived at Havre four days after their departure from Paris. It was about five in the evening when they reached that city, and no intelligence

had yet been received regarding Madame.

They immediately sought for lodgings; but from that moment there was great confusion among the masters, and great quarrels among the servants. In the midst of all this conflict the Count de Guiche thought he recognized the voice of Manicamp.

It was, in fact, that young gentleman, who had arrived some time before the count; but as Malicorne had taken possession of his best suit of clothes, he could only manage to purchase back one of violet colored velvet, embroidered with silver.

Guiche recognized him in the crowd, as much from his dress as his countenance. He had frequently seen Manicamp attired in this violet suit; it was always his last resource.

Manicamp presented himself to the count under an arcade of torches, which almost set fire to the porch by which they were entering the town of Havre and which was situated near the tower of Francis I.

The count, on observing Manicamp's woe-begone visage, could not refrain from laughing.

"Ah! my poor Manicamp," said he "how violet you look. You are in mourning, then?"

"Yes, I am in mourning," replied Manicamp.

"For whom, or for what?"

"For my blue and gold suit which has disappeared, and in place of which I could find but this one; and I have been compelled to use great economy, I can assure you, to get it back again."

"Really!"

"By Jupiter! how could it be otherwise? You have left me without money."

"But you are here; that is the chief point."

"Yes, and by most execrable roads."

"Where are you lodged?"

"Lodged?"

"Yes."

"Why I am not lodged at all."

De Guiche laughed.

"Then where do you mean to lodge?"

"Where you will lodge."

"Then really I do not know."

"How is that, you do not know?"

"Undoubtedly; how would you have me know where I am to lodge?"

"You have not taken a hotel then?"

"Who, I?"

"You, or Monsieur."

"We neither of us thought of it."

Havre is a large place I suppose, and providing there be stabling for twelve horses, and a decent house in a good part of the town—"

"Oh! there are very decent houses."

"Well then?"

"But not for us."

"What mean you by not for us. For whom then?"

"For the English, by Jupiter!"

"For the English?"

"Yes, they are all taken."

"By whom?"

"By the Duke of Buckingham."

"What said you?" cried De Guiche, on whom this name appeared to produce a disagreeable effect.

"Yes, my dear count, all taken by M. de Buckingham. His grace has been preceded by a courier, who arrived here three days ago, and he has taken every lodgeable lodging that was to be found in the city."

"Come now, come now, Manicamp, let us understand each other."

"Egad! what I have said is plain enough, I think."

"But the Duke of Buckingham surely does not think of occupying the whole of the houses in Havre or the devil's in it."

"He does not occupy them yet, for he has not landed, but when once landed he will occupy them."

"He! ho!"

"It is clear enough you do not know these English; they have a mania for monopolizing."

"Good; but a man who has a whole house satisfies himself with that, and does not take two."

"Yes, but two men."

"Well, be it so; two, four, six houses, ten if you will, but not a whole town; there must be a hundred such houses in Havre."

"Well then, all the hundred are hired."

"Impossible!"

"What a wrong headed fellow you are; why, I tell you that the Duke of Buckingham has taken all the houses that surround the one which the queen dowager of England and the princess her daughter are to occupy."

"Ah! that is really very singular," observed De Wardes, patting his horse's neck.

"But so it is, sir."

"Are you quite sure of it, M. de Manicamp?" And while asking this question he gave a sly glance at Guiche, as if to inquire the degree of confidence

which could be placed in the veracity of his friend.

During this time night had closed in, and the torch-bearers, the pages, the lackeys and the esquires, the horses and carriages quite stopped up the gateway and the entrance to the square; the torches were reflected from the channel which the rising tide was filling, while on the opposite side of the jetty could be seen a thousand inquiring faces of seamen and citizens mingled together, all seemingly determined no to lose any incident of this curious spectacle.

While all this was going on, Bragelonne, who was on horseback close behind De Guiche, and appeared totally unconcerned, was vacantly gazing at the reflection of the torches in the water, but inhaling with delight the saline perfume of the waves which broke noisily on the beach, rushing over the boulder stones and seaweed, and casting high into the air its foamings pray.

"But what is the meaning," cried De Guiche, "of the Duke of Buckingham's making such an immense provision of lodgings?"

"Yes," added De Wardes, "what can be his reason?"

"Oh! a very excellent one," replied Manicamp.

"But, do you know what that reason is?"

"I think I know it."

"Speak, then."

"Then bend down your head towards me."

"The deuce! it can be only said in a whisper then."

"You shall yourself judge of that"

"Good."

De Guiche leaned forward.

"Love," said Manicamp.

"I understand you now still less."

"Say, rather, that you do not yet understand."

"Explain yourself."

"Well then; it is positively asserted that his royal highness, Monsieur, will be one of the most unfortunate of husbands."

"How, the Duke of Buckingham—"

"That name carries misfortune with it to the princes of the French family."

"And so the Duke—"

"Is madly in love with the young princess, as people assert, and wishes that no one should approach her but himself."

De Guiche blushed.

"'Tis well; I thank you," said he, pressing Manicamp's head.

Then raising his head again.

"For the love of God," said he, "take care that this report does not reach French ears, or swords will glisten in the sun that fear not English steel."

"After all," said Manicamp, "this is by no means proved to my satisfaction, and may be merely an idle trumped up story."

"No," replied Guiche, "it must be true."

And he involuntarily ground his teeth.

"Well, and should it be so, what matters it to you, what matters it to me, that Monsieur should be what the king his father was. Buckingham the father for the queen—Buckingham the son for young Madame; it concerns no one."

"Manicamp! Manicamp!"

"Why what the devil, it is true; or at all events a saying."

"Silence!" said the count.

"And why should he be silent," observed De Wardes; "it is a very honorable fact for the French nation. Are not you of my opinion, Monsieur le Bragelonne?"

"What fact?" inquired Bragelonne, absently.

"That the English thus pay homage to the beauty of our queens and our princesses."

"I beg your pardon; I have not heard what has been said, and I must ask you to explain."

"Oh! certainly. It appears that it was necessary that the former Duke of Buckingham should come to Paris, in order that his majesty Louis XIII. should discover that his queen was one of the handsomest persons at the court of France; and now it is necessary that the present duke should consecrate by the homage which he pays her, the beauty of a princess of the blood royal of France. It will henceforward be a certain brevet of beauty the having inspired a passion on the other side the channel."

"Sir," replied Bragelonne, "I do not like to hear any thing like jesting on matters of this nature. We, who are gentlemen, are guardians of the honor of our queens and princesses. If we speak lightly and laughingly of them what will the lackeys do?"

"Ho! ho! sir," said De Wardes,

who colored up to the ears, "how am I to take this?"

"Take it as you please, sir," coldly replied Bragelonne.

"Bragelonne! Bragelonne!" murmured Guiche.

"Monsieur de Wardes," cried Manicamp, seeing the young man urge his horse towards Bragelonne.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said De Guiche, "do not give such an example in public, in the street. De Wardes, you are in the wrong."

"In the wrong! and how, I should wish to know?"

"In the wrong, because you always speak ill of something or of somebody," retorted Raoul with his implacable self-possession.

"Be more indulgent, Raoul," said De Guiche, in a whisper.

"And do not think of fighting before you have rested yourselves, you would not do any thing worthy of your valor," said Manicamp.

"Come, come," cried Guiche, "forward, gentlemen, forward."

And thereupon pushing aside the horses and the pages, he made his way through the crowd till he reached the square, followed by the whole of the retinue.

A large gate opening into a court-yard presented itself: Guiche went into this court-yard; Bragelonne, De Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen followed him.

There they held a sort of council of war; they deliberated as to the means to be adopted in order to save the dignity of the embassy.

Bragelonne advised that the rights of priority should be respected.

De Wardes proposed that the city should be sacked.

This proposal appeared rather too energetic to Manicamp.

He proposed that they should sleep before doing any thing so desperate.

Unfortunately, two things were necessary before his advice could be carried into effect.

A house and beds.

De Guiche reflected for some time, and then cried out loudly,

"Who loves me, follows me!"

"The servants too?" inquired a page, who had advanced to the group.

"Every body," cried the fiery young man. "Come, Manicamp, conduct us to the house which her royal highness is to occupy."

Without at all imagining the project of the count, his friends followed him, escorted by a crowd of people whose applause and joy was of good presage to the project, yet unknown, about to be undertaken by these ardent youths.

The wind was whistling loudly from the port and every now and then roared in heavy squalls.

CHAPTER IV.

AT SEA.

The following day the weather was somewhat more calm, although the wind still blew hard.

The sun had, however, risen from a bank of roseate clouds, throwing its blood red rays upon the crest of the dark waves.

An impatient watch was kept from the top of the lighthouses.

A vessel was signalized about eleven in the morning; this vessel was advancing under a heavy press of canvass; two others followed her at the distance of about half a mile.

They advanced like arrows let fly from the bow of a powerful archer, and yet the sea was so high that the rapidity of their course was as nothing to the movements of the waves which rocked them incessantly from side to side.

Shortly afterwards the build of the vessels, and their flags caused them to be recognized as English.

At the head of them sailed the ship on board of which was the princess, and which bore the admiral's flag.

The news was soon spread throughout the town that the princess was about to arrive. All the French nobility hastened to the port, and the populace crowded the quays and jetties.

Two hours afterwards the ships which were astern had come up with the admiral, and all three, not daring doubtless to venture through the narrow channel which led into the port, cast anchor between La Heve and Havre.

As soon as this manoeuvre was completed the admiral's ship fired a salute of twelve guns, which was returned by one of equal number from the tower of Francis I.

Immediately a hundred boats put off from the shore; they were ornamented with cushions of rich silk stuffs; they

were intended to carry the French gentlemen to the vessels at anchor.

But on seeing them even when still within the port, rolling violently; on seeing that just outside the jetty, the waves were running mountains high, and broke upon the beach with thundering roars, it was at once felt that not one of those boats could proceed half the distance without upsetting.

There was, however, a pilot-boat which, notwithstanding the high sea and wind, was hoisting sail to go out to place itself under the orders of the English admiral.

De Guiche had been endeavoring to find among all those boats one that was of larger build than the rest, and in which he would have a chance of reaching the English ships, when he perceived the pilot-boat.

"Raoul," said he, "do you not think it disgraceful for intelligent beings and who are strong as we are, to recoil before this mere brutal strength of wind and water?"

"That is precisely the reflection I was just making to myself."

"Well then, do you not think we should jump on board this boat and try to make head against them. Will you go, De Wardes?"

"Take care! you will only get yourself drowned," said Manicamp.

"And to no purpose," added De Wardes, "for the wind is right ahead and you would never reach the ships."

"Then you refuse?"

"Yes, I faith. I would willingly risk my life in a combat against men," said he, looking askance at Bragelonne, "but to fight with oars against salt water waves is by no means to my taste."

"And I," said Manicamp, "were I even sure of reaching the ships, have no mind to ruin the only decent suit of clothes I have left, for salt water splashes and its stains."

"Then you also refuse?" cried De Guiche.

"I do so, and I beg you to understand this positively, and would refuse again and again," replied Manicamp.

"But look there now," exclaimed De Guiche, "look, De Wardes, look, Manicamp, yonder is the princess on the deck of the admiral's ship observing us."

"A stronger reason still, my dear friend, for not taking a ridiculous bath just before her eyes."

"Is that your last word, Manicamp?"

"Yes."

"Is that your last word, De Wardes?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go alone."

"That you shall not," said Raoul, "I will go with you. I thought that perfectly understood."

The fact is that Raoul, impelled by no secret passion like De Guiche, coolly calculated the danger, and although seeing it was imminent, was led to accompany his friend in this daring act because De Wardes shrunk from it.

The pilot-boat was just moving off, De Guiche called to the coast-pilot.

"Hallo! you in the boat," he cried, "here are two of us wish to go with you."

And rolling five or six pistoles in a piece of paper he threw them from the quay into the boat.

"You do not seem to be afraid of salt water, my masters," said the pilot.

"We are not afraid of any thing," said De Guiche.

"Then jump in, gentlemen."

The pilot laid his boat alongside the quay and the two young men with equal agility jumped into it.

"Come now, courage my lads," cried De Guiche, "I have still twenty pistoles in this purse, and if we reach the admiral's ship they shall be yours."

Upon the word the rowers vigorously plied their oars, and the boat was soon bounding over the raging waves.

The crowd on shore felt great interest in this hazardous enterprise; the whole population of Havre had thronged to the jetties; all of them were gazing anxiously after the boat.

Sometimes the frail bark would appear to remain for a moment suspended on the foaming crest of a wave, then it would suddenly disappear in the trough of the sea as if never to ascend again.

Nevertheless after an hour's struggle the boat reached the admiral's ship, from which two boats had been lowered to go to her assistance should it be necessary.

On the after part of the admiral's ship, sheltered by a canopy of velvet and ermine, made secure by strong standfasts, were the dowager queen and the young princess, attended by the admiral, the Earl of Norfolk. They were gazing with terror at this small vessel which now seemed raised to the skies then sank again into an invisible abyss, above the dark stern of which would be perceived shining, like two

luminous apparitions, the noble figures of the two French gentlemen.

The crew of the admiral's ship, either leaning over the bulwarks or clinging to the shrouds, were watching the approach of the boat, applauding the courage of the two intrepid officers, the skill of the pilot, and the strength of the rowers.

A loud hurrah of triumph welcomed the arrival of the boat alongside the ship.

The Earl of Norfolk, a handsome young man about twenty-six years old, went forward to receive them as soon as they came on deck.

De Guiche and Bragelonne had lightly sprung up to the leeward gangway, and were conducted by the Earl of Norfolk to make their obeisance to the princess and her royal mother, the Earl resuming his place behind them.

Respect, and moreover a certain timidity which he could not account for, had prevented De Guiche until that moment from attentively observing the young princess.

The latter, on the contrary, had been looking at him and had asked her mother,

"Is not that MONSIEUR whom we perceive in that boat?"

The queen dowager, who was better acquainted with Monsieur than her daughter, had smiled at the error into which her self-love had induced her, and had replied,

"No, it is only M. de Guiche, his favorite."

On hearing this the young princess was obliged to restrain the instinctive kindly feeling which the daring of the count had produced.

Some moments elapsed before De Guiche could summon up sufficient resolution to raise his eyes to her face, in order to compare the original with the portrait.

When he saw that lovely pallid face, those animated eyes, those adorable chestnut locks, those trembling lips and that eminently royal deportment which appeared at once to thank and encourage, he was seized with such violent emotions that but for Raoul, who caught him by the arm he would have fallen.

The astonished look of his friend, a kind gesture of the queen recalled De Guiche's self-possession.

In a few words he explained his mission, told them that he was the

representative of Monsieur, and saluted according to their rank and the attentions which they paid him, the admiral and the other English lords who were grouped around the princess.

Bragelonne was presented in his turn and graciously received: every one knew the part which his father the Count de la Fère, had played in the restoration of Charles II., besides which it was the count who had been charged with the negotiation of the marriage which had thus restored the granddaughter of Henry IV. to France.

Raoul spoke the English language perfectly; he made himself the interpreter between his friend and the young English lords, to whom our language was not familiar.

At that moment appeared a young man of very remarkable beauty, and whose costume and arms were splendidly rich. He approached the queen and princess, who were conversing with the Earl of Norfolk, and, in a voice which but ill-disguised his impatience, said—

"It is now time your Royal Highnesses should land."

Upon this invitation the young princess was about to accept the hand which the young man had held out to her with a vivacity replete with various feelings, when the admiral advanced and placed himself between the young princess and the new comer.

"A moment, if you please, my Lord of Buckingham; for ladies to land at this time is impossible: the sea is running too high; but it is probable that the wind will lull towards four o'clock. The landing, therefore, will take place only this evening."

"Permit me, my lord," said Buckingham, with an irritation of manner that he did not even attempt to disguise, "permit me to say, that you are detaining these ladies, and you have not the right to do so. One of these ladies, alas! now belongs to France, and you see that France claims her by the voice of her ambassadors."

And he pointed to De Guiche and Raoul, saluting them at the same time.

"I do not suppose," replied the admiral, "that it enters into the views of these gentlemen to expose the lives of the queen and princess."

"My lord, these gentlemen have come safely through against the wind; permit me to believe that the danger will not be so great when returning with the wind."

"These gentlemen are very courageous," said the admiral, "you yourself saw that many in the port did not dare to follow them. Besides, the desire they naturally felt to present their homage at the earliest possible moment to the princess and her illustrious mother, induced them to venture on the sea, dangerously rough to-day, even for sailors. But these gentlemen, whom I shall present to my officers as an example, cannot form one ladies."

Madame cast a side glance at the count, and perceived that his face was perfectly crimson.

That glance was not perceived by Buckingham. He had no eyes but to watch Norfolk. He was evidently jealous of the admiral, and seemed to burn with desire to tear the royal ladies from the moving castle of which the admiral was king.

"Moreover," rejoined Buckingham, "I appeal to the princess herself."

"And I, my lord, I appeal to my conscience and my responsibility. I have promised to conduct the princess safely to France: I will keep my promise."

"But, nevertheless, sir."—

"My lord, permit me to remind you that I alone command here."

"My lord, do you know what you are saying?" haughtily retorted Buckingham.

"Perfectly; and I repeat it, I alone command here, my lord; and all obey me—the sea, the wind, the ships, and men."

These words were grandly and nobly pronounced. Raoul observed their effect on Buckingham. The latter trembled with rage in every limb, and supported himself by catching hold of one of the stays of the canopy to avoid falling: his eyeballs were suffused with blood, and the hand he had at liberty clutched the hilt of his sword.

"My lord," said the queen, "permit me to tell you that I am in every point of the same opinion as the Earl of Norfolk; and, even if the weather, instead of being bad and charged with vapors as it is at this moment, were perfectly pure and favorable, we certainly owe a few hours to the officer who has so happily conducted us, and with such great attention, in sight of the coast of France, where he is about to leave us."

Buckingham, instead of replying, consulted the princess by a look.

The latter, who was half concealed by the velvet and golden curtains which sheltered her, had not at all listened to this discussion, being occupied in observing the Count de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul.

This was a new blow to Buckingham, who thought that he discovered in the look of the Princess Henrietta a deeper feeling than that of curiosity.

He withdrew, his limbs trembling beneath him, and staggered against the mizen-mast.

"The Duke of Buckingham has not the sure feet of a sailor," observed the queen in French, "that is doubtless his reason for so anxiously desiring to be on terra firma."

The young man heard these words, turned pale, and, discouraged, let fall his hands listlessly by his side, and withdrew, confounding in a deep-drawn sigh his former love and his new-born hatreds.

The admiral, however, paid no further attention to the ill-humor of the duke, but escorted the queen and the princess into the cabin, where dinner had been served up with a magnificence worthy of all the guests.

The admiral seated himself at the right hand of the princess, and placed Guiche on her left.

This was the place usually occupied by Buckingham.

And therefore, when he entered the dining-room it was with great pain that he found himself compelled by etiquette, that other queen to whom he owed respect, to assume a rank inferior to that to which he had been hitherto accustomed.

On his side, De Guiche, whom happiness had rendered even more pale than his rival had become with anger, sat himself down tremblingly by the side of the princess, whose silk robe, when it touched him, sent coursing through his whole being a shuddering sensation at once of bitterness and voluptuousness before unknown to him.

When the repast had terminated, Buckingham rushed forward to present his hand to the princess.

But it was then De Guiche's turn to give a lesson to the duke.

"My Lord," said he "be good enough from this moment, not to interpose yourself between her royal highness, Madame, and me. For from this moment her royal highness, in fact, belongs to France, and it is the hand of Monsieur,

the brother of the king, which touches the hand of the princess, when her royal highness does me the honor to touch my hand."

And while uttering these last words, he, himself presented his hand to the princess, with a timidity so visible, and at the same time with such courageous nobleness, that the English broke out into a murmur of admiration, while Buckingham allowed a sigh of grief to escape him.

Raoul loved. Raoul could appreciate all.

He fixed upon his friend one of those penetrating looks which a friend alone, or a mother can cast, as if to guard or to watch over a child, or a friend when wandering from the path of duty.

At length, at about two o'clock, the sun appeared, the wind fell, the sea became as smooth as the surface of a mirror; the haze which hung along the coast was drawn up like a veil, and was altogether dispelled.

Then the fertile hills of France appeared, with their thousands of white houses, which stood out in beautiful relief before the green trees, or backed by the azure hues of a brilliant sky.

CHAPTER V.

THE TENTS.

THE admiral, as we have seen, had adopted the resolution of not paying any further attention to the threatening looks and the convulsive impetuosity of Buckingham.

And, in fact, since leaving the shores of England he must have gradually become accustomed to it.

De Guiche had not yet remarked, in any way, the animosity which the young duke appeared to entertain against him, but he felt no instinct, no sympathy, which impelled him towards the favorite of Charles II.

The queen-mother, with a much more extensive experience, and possessed of greater coolness, fully comprehended the dangerous position of affairs, and she prepared herself accordingly to cut the Gordian knot of them as soon as the moment of necessity should arrive.

It was not long before this necessity betrayed itself. Calmness had been restored every where excepting to the

impetuous heart of Buckingham, who, in his impatience, was constantly repeating in a whisper to the young princess,

"Madam, madam, in the name of heaven I implore you let us land at once. Oh, you not see that this coxcomb, the Earl of Norfolk is killing me by his minute attentions and adorations."

Henrietta heard these words; she smiled, but without turning round, giving merely to her voice that inflection of soft reproach and languishing impertinence, with which coquetry knows how to give an assent, while having the air of defending itself.

"My dear lord," said she, "I have already told you that you are mad."

None of these details, as we have before said, escaped Raoul's observation; he had heard Buckingham's entreaty, the answer of the princess; he had seen Buckingham start back a step on receiving that answer, heave a sigh, and press his hand to his forehead, and having no veil over his eyes or around his heart, he understood all and shuddered when reflecting on the unhappy state of circumstances and of these men's minds.

At length the admiral with studied deliberation, gave orders for the preparing of the boats.

Buckingham welcomed these orders with such transports of joy, that a stranger might have imagined that the young man was deranged.

At the command of the Earl of Norfolk, the ship's long boat, already ornamented with the English and French colors, was slowly lowered over the side; the boat was manned by twenty rowers and would contain fifteen passengers.

Velvet carpets and cushions embroidered with the arms of England, garlands of flowers, for in those days they cultivated allegories even amidst political alliances; all these decorations we say ornamented this truly royal bark.

The boat had scarcely touched the water, scarcely had the rowers seated themselves in it and poised their oars, waiting like soldiers with presented arms, for the signal of the embarkation of the princess, than Buckingham ran to the gangway ladder to take his place in the boat, but the queen stopped him.

"My lord," said she, "it would not be proper that you should allow my daughter and myself to land without having

first ascertained, and this from your own knowledge, that our lodgings are in due order to receive us. I must therefore beg of you, my lord, to precede us to Havre, and to see that every thing is properly regulated for our arrival."

This was a thunderstroke to the duke, and the more terrible from its being altogether unexpected. He stammered, colored, but could not reply. He had flattered himself that he should remain near the princess during the passage from the ship to the shore, and thus enjoy to the very last the moments that fortune had bestowed upon him.

But the order was express.

The admiral who heard it, immediately called out,

"Lower one of the quarter-boats."

The order was executed with that rapidity peculiar to manœuvres on board ships of war.

Buckingham, rendered quite desperate, cast a despairing glance at the princess, one of supplication to the queen, and one of threatening fury at the admiral.

The princess pretended not to observe it.

The queen turned away her head.

The admiral only laughed.

Buckingham on observing this laugh was about to rush on Norfolk.

The queen-mother rose from her chair.

"Do as I have requested," said she, in an authoritative tone to Buckingham.

The young duke paused, but looking fiercely around him and endeavoring to make a last effort,

"And you, gentlemen," said he, almost suffocated by his various emotions, "you, Monsieur de Guiche, you Monsieur de Bragelonne, will you not accompany me?"

De Guiche bowed.

"Both myself and M. de Bragelonne are at the queen's orders," he replied, "whatever she may command we will do."

And he looked at the young princess who cast down her eyes.

"Your pardon, my lord of Buckingham," said the queen, "but here M. de Guiche is the representative of Monsieur; it is he who has to do the honors of France as you have performed the same honors on the part of England. He cannot therefore do otherwise than accompany us. We owe him, moreover, this slight favor, after the courage he

has evinced in coming to meet us in this stormy weather."

Buckingham opened his mouth as if to reply, but whether it was that his ideas were so confused as not to enable him to find words to utter them, no sound issued from his lips, but turning round as if completely maddened by vexation, he jumped into the boat.

The boat's crew had scarcely time to prevent his going overboard, and to save themselves; for Buckingham jumped so violently on the gunwale of the boat that she was nearly capsized. The sailors steadied her by holding on the manropes.

"His grace is decidedly mad," said the admiral aloud to Raoul.

"I am alarmed for my lord," replied Bragelonne.

During the whole time that it took the boat to get to the shore, the duke did not cease gazing at the admiral's ship, as a miser would have done when torn from his money-bags, or a mother on being dragged from her child when condemned to death.

But no notice was taken of his signals, of his manifestations, of his lamentable attitudes. Buckingham was so astounded at this, that he threw himself upon the sternsheets, clutched his hair with his hands while the heedless sailors made the boat bound over the waves.

On arriving he was in such a state of complete torpor, that had he not met on the quay the messenger whom he had sent forward as his quarter-master, he would not have been able to ask his way.

When he arrived at the house which had been taken expressly for him, he shut himself up in it like Achilles in his tent.

The boat, however, which bore the queen and the princess, left the admiral's ship at the same moment that Buckingham reached the shore. Another boat followed them full of officers, courtiers, and eager friends.

The whole of the population of Havre had hastily thrown themselves into boats of all descriptions, fishing boats, flat boats, or long Norman galleys to go out to meet the royal bark.

The guns of the several forts vomited forth their thunder; the admiral's ship and the two others fired their salutes, and volumes of flame and smoke issued from the gaping mouths of the artillery in dense clouds, which for a few moments covered the

face of ocean and then melted away into the azure sky.

The princess landed at the jetty steps, and joyous music awaited her and accompanied her progress, while advancing towards the centre of the town her delicate feet trod on rich tapestry and masses of flowers that were strewn in her path. De Guiche and Raoul slipped away from the crowd of English, taking the nearest way across the town to the house which had been designated as the residence of the princess.

"Let us hasten," said Raoul to De Guiche, "for from what I know of Buckingham, he will endeavor to play us some untoward trick when he sees the result of our last night's deliberations."

"Oh!" said the count, "we have De Wardes there, who is firmness personified, and Manicamp, who is gentleness itself."

De Guiche, notwithstanding this, used all diligence, and five minutes afterwards they arrived in sight of the Hôtel de Ville.

That which first struck them was a large crowd of persons assembled in the square.

"Good!" cried De Guiche, "it appears that our lodgings are already built."

And in fact, in the square and close to the Hôtel de Ville rose eight tents of great magnificence, surmounted by the flags of France and England waving unitedly.

The approach to the Hôtel de Ville was surrounded by these tents as with a party-colored girdle. Ten pages and twelve light-horsemen who had been sent as an escort to the ambassadors, kept guard before these tents.

It was a strange and curious spectacle, there was something fairy-like about it. These temporary habitations had been constructed, like Aladdin's palace, during the night, lined without and within with the richest stuffs that De Guiche could procure in Havre; they completely encircled the Hôtel de Ville, that is to say, the princess's residence; they were joined to one another merely by cables of silk, guarded by sentinels, so that Buckingham's plan was completely thwarted, if that plan had really the intention of keeping for himself and his English followers the approaches to the Hôtel de Ville.

The only passage through which access could be obtained to the steps of

the edifice, and which was not closed by this silken barricade, was guarded by two tents resembling two pavilions, the doors of which opened on each side of this passage.

These two tents were appropriated to De Guiche and Raoul, and in their absence were to be constantly occupied by De Wardes and Manicamp, De Wardes taking charge of De Guiche's tent, and Manicamp of Raoul's.

And around these two tents and the six others, a hundred persons, consisting of officers, pages, and gentlemen, glittering in silk and gold, were buzzing like bees around their hives.

All these having their swords buckled to their sides, were ready at the slightest signal to obey the orders of De Guiche or Bragelonne, the two chiefs of the embassy.

At the moment that the two young men appeared at the end of a street which led into the square, they perceived a horseman galloping across the square. He was a young man of marvellous elegance. He divided the crowd of inquiring persons, and coming suddenly upon these tents which had sprung up as by magic, he uttered a cry of despair.

It was Buckingham—Buckingham who had just shaken off his stupor and had attired himself in a dazzlingly splendid costume, in order to proceed to the Hôtel de Ville, and there await the arrival of the queen and princess.

But at the entrance of the tents his passage was impeded, and he was compelled to stop.

Buckingham being exasperated raised his whip, two officers seized his arm.

Of the two guardians only one was present, De Wardes had gone into the interior of the Hôtel de Ville, to transmit some orders given by De Guiche.

On hearing the noise made by Buckingham, Manicamp who was lounging lazily on a sofa near the entrance of the tent, rose with his accustomed listlessness, and perceiving that the noise continued, raised the curtain of the tent and went out.

"What is the matter?" he said, with much gentleness, "and who is it that is making this great noise?"

As chance would have it at the very moment he began speaking, silence had been restored, and although his tone was so mild and moderate, every body heard his question.

Buckingham turned round looking

at this tall meager form and the indolent looking features.

Probably the person of our gentleman, who was, as we have before said, very plainly dressed, did not inspire much respect, for Buckingham replied disdainfully,

"Who are you, sir?"

Manicamp who had taken hold of the arm of an enormously tall light-horseman, who was solid as the pillar of a cathedral, retorted in the same tranquil tone,

"And you, sir?"

"I am the Duke of Buckingham. I have hired all the houses surrounding the Hôtel de Ville, where I have business; and having hired those houses they are mine, and as my purpose in hiring them was to have free access to the Hôtel de Ville, you have no right to hinder my access to it."

"But, sir, who is it that prevents your reaching it?" inquired Manicamp.

"Why, your sentinels."

"Because you want to pass or horseback, sir, and our orders are to allow only persons on foot to go there."

"No one has a right to give orders here but myself," said Buckingham.

"And how so, sir?" inquired Manicamp, in his soft voice. "Have the goodness to explain that enigma to me."

"Because as I have told you I have hired all the houses in the square."

"Oh! that we are well assured of, for the only place left to us was the open square."

"You are mistaken, sir, the square is mine as well as the houses."

"Oh! your pardon, sir, you are in error. In our country we say the king's pavement; therefore the square belongs to the king, and as we are the king's ambassadors, the square is ours."

"Sir, I have already asked you who you are?" cried Buckingham, exasperated at the perfect self-possession of his interlocutor.

"They call me Manicamp," replied the young man in his eolian tones, so soft and harmonious were they.

Buckingham shrugged up his shoulders.

"In short," said he, "when I hired the houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, the square was free; these barracks obstruct my view; remove these barracks."

A hollow and threatening murmur ran through the crowd of auditors.

De Guiche arrived just at this mo-

ment; he pressed through the crowd that separated him from Buckingham, and followed by Raoul he arrived on the one side while De Wardes arrived on the other.

"Your pardon, my lord," said he, but if you have any observation to make have the goodness to address them to me, seeing that it was I who gave the plan for these tents."

"And besides, sir, I would remark to you, that the word barrack is an offensive term," gracefully added Mani-camp.

"You were saying, sir," continued De Guiche,

"I was saying, my lord count," replied Buckingham, with a still apparent tone of anger, although tempered by the presence of an equal, "I was saying that it is impossible these tents can remain where they are?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed De Guiche, and why so?"

"Because they inconvenience me."

De Guiche allowed an impatient gesture to escape him, but a warning glance from Raoul caused him to be more guarded.

"They must be less inconvenient, sir, than the abuse of priority which you have allowed yourself."

"An abuse."

"Why, undoubtedly. You send here a messenger who hires in your name, the whole town of Havre, without at all troubling yourself with regard to the French gentlemen who were to come here to meet Madame. This was any thing but fraternal, my lord Duke, in the representative of a friendly nation."

"The ground belongs to the first occupant," said Buckingham.

"Not in France, sir."

"And why not in France?"

"Because it is the country of politeness."

"What mean you by that?" exclaimed Buckingham, in so impetuous a manner that the crowd drew back, expecting an immediate collision.

"I mean to say, sir," replied De Guiche, turning pale, "that I had these lodgings constructed for myself and friends, as an asylum for the ambassadors of France, as the only shelter which your unreasonableness left us in the town; and that these lodgings I will inhabit, I and those with me, until a more powerful and above all a more sovereign will than yours expels me from them."

"That is to say ejects us, as our law terms have it," gently added Mani-camp.

"I know one, sir, which shall be such, I hope as you desire," said Buckingham, placing his hand on the hilt of his sword.

At this moment, and just as the goddess of Discord was about to inflame the minds and turn all swords against human bosoms, Raoul gently placed his hand on Buckingham's shoulder,

"One word, my lord," said he.

"My right! my right before all!" exclaimed the fiery young man.

"It is precisely on that point that I wish to have the honor of a few moment's conversation," said Raoul.

"Well, be it so, but on long speeches, sir."

"One only question; you see it would be impossible for any one to be more brief."

"Speak, I am listening."

"Is it you or his highness the Duke of Orleans, who is about to marry the granddaughter of Henry the Fourth?"

"What say you?" demanded Buckingham, starting with affright.

"Answer me, sir, I beg of you!" tranquilly insisted Raoul.

"Is it your intention to deride me, sir?" inquired Buckingham.

"That is a reply although a question, sir, and that suffices. Therefore you acknowledge that it is not you who are about to espouse the princess royal of England?"

"You know that full well, sir, I should imagine."

"I beg your pardon, but from your conduct the thing was by no means clear."

"Come, sir, to the fact, what is it you pretend to say?"

Raoul drew nearer to the duke.

"You give way," said he, lowering his voice, "to furious passion, which much resembles jealousy; do you know that, my lord? Now, this jealousy with regard to a woman, does not befit a man who is neither her lover nor her husband; and the reason is so much the stronger, and this I am confident you will comprehend, my lord, when that woman is a princess."

"Sir," cried Buckingham, "do you mean to insult the princess Henrietta?"

"It is you," calmly replied Bragelonne, "it is you, my lord, who insult her; beware of that. Even but a short time ago, you exasperated the queen and tired the patience of the admiral, I

was observing you, my lord, and at first imagined you were mad, but have since divined the real character of that madness."

"Sir."

"Patience for a moment, for I have a word to add, I trust I am the only Frenchman who has yet divined it."

"But do you know, sir," cried Buckingham, trembling both with anger and anxiety, "do you know that you are holding language which deserves repression?"

"Weigh well your words, my lord," replied Raoul haughtily; "I am not of a race whose vivacity allows itself to be repressed, while on the contrary, you, you are of a race whose passions are suspicious to the eyes of all good Frenchmen. I once more tell you to beware, my lord."

"And of what, sir, if you please? Are you, perchance, threatening me?"

"I am the son of the Count de la Fère, my lord Duke, and I never threaten, because I always strike before I threaten. Therefore let us clearly understand each other, the threat which I hold out is this?"

Buckingham clenched his hands, but Raoul continued without appearing to observe it.

"On the first word, unbecoming word, that you shall allow yourself to address to Her royal Highness—Oh! be patient my lord of Buckingham, for I am, as you see, perfectly so."

"You?"

"Undoubtedly, while the princess was still on English ground, I held my peace; but now that she has touched the soil of France, now that we, in the name of the prince, have received her, at the very first insult, that you in your extraordinary attachment, shall commit against the honor of the royal house of France, I have two modes of proceeding; either I will declare before the world the madness with which you are attainted, at this moment, and will have you disgracefully sent back to England, or, if you prefer it, I will bury my poniard in your breast, in full assembly; moreover, I believe this second means to be the best and think I shall adhere to it."

Buckingham's face had become more pale than the lace ruff with which his neck was surrounded.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," said he, "is it really a gentleman who is uttering these words?"

"Yes, only that this gentleman is speaking to a madman. Cure yourself, my lord, and he will speak to you in other terms."

"Oh! but Monsieur de Bragelonne," murmured the duke, in a voice half suffocated with emotion, and pressing his hand to his neck, "do you not see that I am dying!"

"Were such an event to happen at this moment, sir," said Raoul with imperturbable coolness, "I should, in truth, regard it as a most happy one, for that event would forestall all sorts of scandalous reports with regard to you and the illustrious person whom your devotedness so madly compromises."

"Oh! you are right! you are right!" exclaimed the young man, distractedly; "yes, yes, death! yes, it were better to die than suffer as I do at this moment."

And he hastily clutched the hilt of his poniard, which was set with precious stones, and drew it half out of his bosom.

Raoul pushed back his hand.

"Beware, sir," said he, "if you do not kill yourself the act is a ridiculous one; if you do, you will stain with blood the nuptial robe of the princess of England."

Buckingham remained for a minute palpitating with contending emotions. During that minute his lips quivered, his features were distorted, his eyes wandered, as if he had been struck with sudden delirium.

Then suddenly he exclaimed—

"Monsieur de Bragelonne, I know not a more noble mind than yours; you are the worthy son of the most perfect gentleman on earth: remain in your tents."

And he threw his arms round the neck of Raoul.

All the spectators, astounded at this movement, for which they were altogether unprepared, having observed the impetuous stampings of one of the adversaries and the firm bearing of the other, clapped their hands as if with one accord, and a thousand bravos, a thousand joyous and applauding cries, rose to the skies.

Guiche, in his turn, embraced Buckingham, it must be acknowledged, rather against his will, but he did embrace him.

This was a signal for all the rest. The English and French, who until then had looked askance at each other, immediately fraternized.

Just after all this had occurred the procession accompanying the queen and the princess passed by to the Hôtel de Ville, and who but for Bragelonne, would have found two armies in mortal combat, and the flowers prepared for the festival stained with blood.

On the appearance of the first banner all this noisy crowd was hushed, and ranged itself on either side the passage to see the procession pass.

CHAPTER VI.

NIGHT.

Concord had once more established herself in the midst of the tents. English and French rivalled each other in gallant attentions to the illustrious travellers, and in polite observances among themselves. The English sent to the French flowers, which they had provided in honor of the arrival of the young princess: the French invited the English to a supper which was to be given on the next evening.

The princess therefore was received by all with unanimous felicitations. She appeared like a queen from the respect which she every where inspired, as an idol from the adoration offered to her by some few.

The queen-mother gave a most affectionate welcome to the French who were presented to her. France was her own native country, and she had been too unhappy in England for England ever to make her forget France. She therefore taught her daughter, from her own self-love, the love of that country which had hospitably received them, and where they were now about to enjoy the good fortune of a brilliant future.

When they had entered the Hôtel de Ville, and the crowd of spectators had dispersed—when the sound of trumpets and the shoutings of the populace were heard only at a distance—when the night closed in enshrouding with its starry veil the sea, the port, the town, and the surrounding country, still excited by this great event—De Guiche entered his tent and seated himself on a bench, with such an expression of grief that Bragelonne stood anxiously gazing at him until he heard him sigh; he then drew nearer to him. The count had thrown back his head

and was reclining against the side of the tent, his forehead covered with his hands, his breast heaving violently and his knees trembling.

"You are suffering, dear friend?" inquired Raoul.

"Cruelly."

"Mere bodily suffering, is it not?"

"Yes, bodily."

"The day has, in fact, been a fatiguing one," continued the young man, his eyes fixed intently on Guiche.

"Yes, and sleep will refresh me."

"Do you wish that I should leave you?"

"No, I have to speak to you."

"I shall not let you speak until I myself have questioned you, Guiche."

"Well, question me, as you will."

"But be frank."

"As always."

"Do you know why Buckingham was so furious?"

"I have some guess of it."

"He is in love with the princess, is he not?"

"At all events one would swear so from his actions."

"Well, then, it is not so at all."

"Oh! you are for once mistaken, Raoul; for I could read his passion in his eyes, his gestures, in all that he has done since this morning."

"You are a poet, my dear count, and you see poetry in every thing."

"I see love more clearly than any other thing."

"Even where it does not exist."

"Where it does exist."

"Come, now, Guiche, do you believe that you are not mistaken?"

"Oh! I am perfectly certain of it," eagerly cried the count.

"Tell me, count," said Raoul, looking earnestly at him, "what is it that makes you so particularly clear-sighted?"

"Why," said Guiche, hesitatingly, "self-love."

"Self-love! that is rather a long word, Guiche."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to say, my friend, that usually you are less sorrowful than you are this evening."

"The fatigue—"

"Fatigue?"

"Yes."

"Listen to me, my dear friend; we have been in campaign together, and on horseback for eighteen hours at a stretch; three horses have fallen under us, knocked up from fatigue or hunger,

and yet we were still gay and joyous. It is not fatigue that makes you so gloomy, count."

"Then it is vexation."

"What vexation?"

"That of this evening."

"The folly of the Duke of Buckingham?"

"Why, certainly. Is it not annoying to us Frenchmen, the representatives of our master, to see an Englishman paying court to our future mistress, the second lady in the kingdom?"

"Yes, you are right; but I do not believe that Lord Buckingham is dangerous."

"No, but he is troublesome. On arriving here did he not come very near setting us at complete variance with the English? and had it not been for your admirable prudence and your most singular firmness we should have been fighting here in the open streets."

"But he has changed, you see."

"Yes, undoubtedly; and thence proceeds my amazement: you spoke to him in a whisper; what did you say to him?—You believe he loves; you say so; a passion yields not so easily; he is not then in love with her?"

And Guiche pronounced these last words with such an expression that Raoul raised his head.

The noble features of the young man expressed a displeasure which was readily discerned.

"What I said to him, count," replied Raoul, "I will repeat to you. Listen attentively; this is what I said to him:—You look sir, with desiring eyes, with feelings of insulting love on the sister of your king, who cannot be your wife, and who is not, nor can never be your mistress. You therefore are guilty of an insult to me who came to conduct a young bride to her husband."

"Did you say that to him?" cried De Guiche, coloring deep'y.

"Yes in so many words, and I even went farther than that."

Guiche appeared much moved.

"I said to him; What opinion would you form if we were you to perceive among us a man so insensate, so disloyal, as to conceive any other feeling than that of the purest respect, with regard to a princess affianced to our master."

These words were so completely applicable to De Guiche himself that he

turned pale, and seized with sudden tremblings, he could but mechanically extend one hand to Raoul while with the other he covered his eyes and face.

"But," continued Raoul, without noticing this demonstration of feeling on the part of his friend, "God be thanked! the French who are proclaimed as frivolous, indiscreet, and thoughtless, know how to apply a sober judgment, a wholesome moral in questions which regard high feelings of decorum. Therefore," added I, "your grace should know that we, the gentlemen of France, serve our kings by sacrificing our passions as well as our fortunes and our lives; and when, by chance, the demon incites us by one of those fatal passions which inflame the heart, we extinguish the flame even should it require to be sprinkled with our blood. By thus acting we at the same moment save the honor of three parties; that of our country, our master, and our own. It is thus, my lord of Buckingham, we act; thus should act every man who has a heart. And this, my dear Guiche," continued Raoul, "is the way in which I spoke to the Duke of Buckingham; and therefore did he yield unresistingly to my reasons."

De Guiche, who had remained with drooping head while Raoul continued speaking, drew himself up, his eyes glancing proudly and his hands feverishly hot, he seized Raoul's hand, his cheeks which before were pale and cold, were now tinged with a bright glow.

"And you spoke well," cried he, in a voice stifled by contending feelings, "and you are a worthy friend; thanks, Raoul, thanks; but now I entreat you leave me to myself."

"You desire I should do so?"

"Yes, I have need of rest, and numberless matters have this day agitated my head and heart; to-morrow, when you return to me, you will find me a very altered man."

"Well, be it so; I will leave you," said Raoul, and was about to withdraw from the tent.

The count hastened after him and pressed him cordially in his arms.

But during that pressure Raoul could discern the shudderings of struggling passion.

The night was cool, starlight and splendid; after the storm, the warmth of the sun had brought back life, and joy, and serenity; along the sky were formed narrow streaks of fleecy clouds whose whiteness tinged with azure

appeared to promise a series of fine days tempered by an eastern breeze. On the square before the hotel, immense shadows divided by long rays of light formed a species of gigantic mosaic work of white and black.

Soon all was sleeping in the city. A faint light was seen glimmering in the apartment of the princess which fronted on the square, and this soft light of the fading lamp appeared an image of the calm slumbers of a young girl whose life had scarcely commenced, and whose fire is also tempered while the body sleeps.

Bragelonne issued from his tent with the slow and cautious paces of a man who with eager curiosity wishes to see all and yet anxious not to be himself seen.

Then shaded by the canvass walls of his own tent, and at one glance perceiving all that was passing on the square, he after a few moments perceived the curtains of De Guiche's tent move gently and then open.

Behind this curtain could be observed the shadow of De Guiche, whose eyes glistened in the darkness, ardently fixed upon the room occupied by the princess.

The soft light which gilded the windows of her room was the count's polar star. The aspirations of his whole soul had mounted to his eyes. Raoul, concealed by the shadow of his tent, divined all the passionate thoughts which established between the tent of the young ambassador and the balcony of the princess a mysterious and magic tie of sympathy; a tie formed by thoughts of such intensity of will, of such besetting power that they certainly called down dreams of love upon the perfumed couch, which the count devoured with his soul's eyes.

But De Guiche and Raoul were not the only ones who were then watching. The window of one of the houses on the square was open—it was the window of the house occupied by Buckingham.

By the light which issued from this window could be discerned the profile of the duke in strong relief; he was leaning on the window sill, on which were placed soft velvet cushions, and he also was addressing to the balcony of the princess his supplications and the mad visions of his frenetic passion.

Bragelonne could not avoid smiling.

"There is a poor heart dreadfully besieged," said he, thinking of the princess

Then his thoughts turning compassionately towards Monsieur, her affianced husband,—

"And there is a poor husband sadly threatened," continued he; "it is well for him that he is a great prince, and has an army to guard his treasure."

Bragelonne continued for some time watching the manoeuvres of the two sighing swains, listened to the sonorous and uncivil snoring of Manicamp, who snored away as proudly as if he had been in actual possession of his blue and gold suit instead of only having his more humble violet colored one; then turned towards the breeze which wafted to his ears the distant melody of a nightingale; then, after having made an ample provision of melancholy, another nocturnal malady, he returned to his tent, to go to bed, thinking then, on his own account, that perhaps four or six eyes equally ardent as those of De Guiche and Buckingham were eagerly gazing at his own idol in the castle at Blois.

"And Mademoiselle de Montalais is not a very solid garrison," said he, in a half whisper, but sighing loudly.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM HAVRE TO PARIS.

THE fêtes appointed for the next day were celebrated with all the pomp and joyousness which the resources of the city and the buoyant spirits of its population could produce.

During the few last hours of the sojourn at Havre preparations were made for the journey to Paris.

The Princess Henrietta of England, whom the French now addressed as MADAME, that being the title always given in France to the wife of MONSIEUR, the brother next in age and dignity to the king—the princess, we say, after having bid farewell to the officers of the fleet, and saluted her country, the last time by saluting its flag, got into her carriage, surrounded by a brilliant escort.

De Guiche had hoped that the Duke of Buckingham would have returned to England with the admiral, but Buckingham succeeded in proving to the queen-mother that it would be absolutely indecorous to allow her daughter to arrive in Paris thus abandoned by all her countrymen.

The point being once settled that Buckingham was to accompany Madame, the young duke selected a court of noblemen and officers destined to form his own retinue, so that it was, in fact, an army journeying towards Paris, scattering gold wherever it passed and displaying these brilliant demonstrations in the midst of the towns and villages which it traversed.

The weather was fine. France is beautiful to view, particularly in the route the procession took. Spring threw her flowers and her balmy shades in the path of this young and brilliant throng. All Normandy, with its vigorous vegetation, its blue horizon, its silvery streams, presented the aspect of a paradise to the new sister of the king.

Festivals and rejoicings awaited them at every step. Guiche and Buckingham were every where. Guiche to repress any new attempts made by the Englishman; Buckingham to reawaken in the heart of the princess a more lively recollection of the country to which was attached the memory of by-gone happy days.

But, alas! the poor duke could perceive that the image of his dear England became daily more and more faint in the mind of Madame, as the love of France became by degrees more profoundly impressed upon it.

In fact, he could perceive that all his little attentions awakened no feeling of gratitude, and although he with much grace bestrode one of the most beautiful and fiery race-horses England had produced, it was only now and then, and that accidentally, that the eyes of the princess were directed to him.

In vain did he endeavor, in order to arrest one of those looks which wandered into space or were fixed elsewhere, to urge the noble animal to feats requiring wonderful agility, strength, and skill; in vain did he excite his horse, whose nostrils seemed to vomit flame, to leap over high fences or gallop down almost precipitate declivities, at the risk of dashing himself to pieces against the trunks of trees, or rolling over into the bed of a river: Madame, attracted by the noise, would for a moment turn her head towards him, give a faint smile, and then continue her conversation with her faithful guardians, Raoul and Guiche, who rode quietly and constantly at her carriage doors.

Then Buckingham would become the prey of jealous fury, tortures of burning, unknown, unheard of intensity would course through all his veins and besiege his heart; then in order to show his contrition and redeem the follies he had committed by the most humble submission, he would restrain his horse and compel it, reeking with sweat and covered with a thick white foam, to champ his bit at the side of the carriage, among the throng of courtiers.

Sometimes he obtained in recompense a word or two from Madame, and even this appeared to him a reproach.

"Ah! my lord, this is as it should be," she would say, "you are now more reasonable."

Or Raoul would say to him,

"You are killing your horse, my lord."

And Buckingham would patiently listen to Raoul, for he felt instinctively, and without any proof being given to him to that effect, that Raoul was the moderator of De Guiche's feelings, and that but for Raoul some mad prank would have been played either by the Count, or himself, and have brought about a rupture; a quarrel followed, perhaps by exile from the presence of the princess, of either the one or the other.

Since the famous conversation between the two young men before the tents at Havre, in which Raoul had made the duke sensible of the indecorum of his manifestations of passion for the princess, Buckingham felt himself involuntarily drawn towards Raoul.

He often engaged him in conversation, and almost always to speak to him of his father, or of D'Artagnan their mutual friend, towards whom Buckingham felt almost as enthusiastically as did Raoul.

Raoul took occasion as often as possible to renew this subject of conversation when De Wardes was present, who during the whole journey had felt mortified at the superiority of Bragelonne, and above all with regard to the influence he exercised over the mind of De Guiche.

De Wardes had that sharp and inquisitive eye which distinguishes men of evil natures; he had immediately remarked De Guiche's melancholy, and his amorous aspirations towards the princess.

In lieu of observing upon this sub

ject the discreet reserve of Raoul, instead of maintaining duly, as did the latter, a proper regard for decorum and his duty, De Wardes resolutely attacked the count upon the subject, exciting that always sonorous chord of juvenile audacity and egotistical pride.

In this state of circumstances it happened one evening during a halt at Mantes, that Guiche and De Wardes were conversing, leaning against a gate, while Buckingham and Raoul were walking up and down, chatting together, and Manicamp was paying his devoirs to the queen and princess, who already treated him with condescending familiarity, on account of the versatility of his knowledge, his openhearted civility of manner, and his conciliatory disposition.

"Acknowledge," said De Wardes to the count, "that your mind is in a very unsettled state, and that your pedagogue does not relieve you from it."

"I do not understand you," said the count.

"And yet it ought to be an easy matter to you, you are pining away from love."

"Folly, De Wardes, folly."

"It would, I acknowledge be a folly, if Madame were indifferent to your martyrdom; but she observes it, and to such a degree that she exposes herself to scandalous remarks, and I really am afraid that on arriving at Paris, your pedagogue, M. De Bragelonne, will denounce you both."

"De Wardes! De Wardes! you are again attacking Bragelonne."

"Come now, a truce to all this childishness," rejoined the evil genius of the count, in a half whisper, "you know as well as I do, what I mean. You clearly perceive that when the princess speaks to you, her eyes become more tender; you understand from the sound of her voice that she is pleased at hearing yours; you feel that she comprehends the verses which you recite to her, and you will not deny that she tells you every morning that she has passed a sleepless night."

"That is true, that is true, De Wardes, but of what avail is it your telling me all this?"

"Is it not important that things should be seen in their true light?"

"No; not when the things we see might drive us mad."

And he turned round anxiously towards the house where the princess had

alighted; as if while repelling De Wardes' insinuations, he wished to find a confirmation of them in her eyes.

"There! there!" cried De Wardes, "look, she is calling you; do you not hear? Come now, take advantage of the opportunity, the pedagogue is not there."

Guiche could not withstand this; an invincible attraction impelled him towards the princess. De Wardes smiled as he hastened away from him.

"You are mistaken, sir," suddenly said Raoul, climbing over the gate, near which, but a few seconds before, the two young men were talking, "the pedagogue is here, and is listening to you."

De Wardes on hearing the voice of Raoul which he recognized without its being necessary to look at him, half drew his sword.

"Put up your sword," said Raoul, "you well know that during the journey we are now performing, any demonstrations of this nature will be useless. Put up your sword, and at the same time restrain your tongue. Why would you instil into the soul of one whom you call your friend, the gall which devours your own? With regard to myself, you would endeavor to make me hate an honest man, my father's friend and mine; as to the count, you would persuade him to love a woman who is the destined wife of our master. Really, sir, you would in my eyes be both a coward and a traitor, if I did not more justly consider you a mad man."

"Sir," exclaimed De Wardes, exasperated, "I was not mistaken in calling you a pedagogue! The tone which you affect, the terms which you adopt, are those of a jesuitical schoolmaster, and not those of a gentleman. Be pleased therefore to dispense with that tone and these terms when addressing me. I hate M. d'Artagnan because he committed a cowardly act towards my father."

"That is false, sir," coolly replied Raoul.

"Oh!" exclaimed De Wardes, "do you give me the lie, sir?"

"And why not, if that which you say is false?"

"You give me the lie, and you do not draw your sword?"

"Sir, I have made a promise to myself not to kill you till we shall have fulfilled our mission by delivering Madame to her husband."

"Kill me! oh, M. Pedant, your birch rod does not kill so easily as that."

"No," coolly replied Raoul, "but the sword of M. d'Artagnan kills; and not only have I his sword, sir, but it was he himself, who taught me how to use it, and it is with that sword, sir, that I will, at the fitting moment, revenge the insult you have offered to his name."

"Sir! sir!" cried De Wardes, "have a care. If you do not give me satisfaction on the spot, I shall consider all means lawful to avenge myself."

"Ho! ho! sir," said Buckingham, suddenly making his appearance, "that is a threat which smells strongly of assassination, and consequently is in marvellously bad taste when coming from a gentleman."

"You said, my lord duke," cried De Wardes, turning round—

"I say, sir, that you have just uttered words which sound strangely to my English ears."

"Well, then, sir, if what you say be true," retorted De Wardes, violently exasperated, "so much the better; I shall find in you, at least, a man who will not slip through my fingers. Take my words, therefore, as you please."

"I take them as they ought to be taken, sir," replied Buckingham, in that haughty tone which was habitual with him, and which in even general conversation gave an air of defiance to all he said. "M. de Bragelonne is my friend; you have insulted M. de Bragelonne, and you shall give me satisfaction for that insult."

De Wardes cast a glance on Bragelonne, who steady to the line of conduct he had determined upon, remained calm and cool, even when he heard the challenge of the duke.

"In the first place," said De Wardes, "it appears that I have not insulted M. de Bragelonne, since M. de Bragelonne, who has a sword by his side, does not consider himself insulted."

"But, in short, you insult some one?"

"Yes, I insult M. d'Artagnan," rejoined De Wardes, who had remarked that this was the only spur by which he could excite the anger of Raoul.

"Oh! that is quite another affair," observed Buckingham.

"Is it not so?" said De Wardes; "it is therefore the place of M. d'Artagnan's friends to defend him."

"I am altogether of your opinion, sir," replied the Englishman, who had recovered his phlegmatic coldness; "if it were M. de Bragelonne who was offended I could not reasonably take the place of M. de Bragelonne, he being present, but as it is a matter that concerns Monsieur d'Artagnan—"

"You give up the point to me, do you not, sir," said De Wardes.

"By no means; on the contrary I draw my sword," said Buckingham, suiting the action to the word; "for if M. d'Artagnan offended your father, he rendered, or endeavored to render, an important service to mine."

De Wardes made a gesture of amazement.

"M. d'Artagnan," continued Buckingham, "is the most valiant gentleman I have ever known. I shall therefore be delighted, having personal obligations to him, to repay them by giving you a sword thrust."

And at the same time Buckingham gracefully saluted Raoul with his sword, and put himself on guard.

De Wardes made a step forward to cross swords with him.

"Softly, softly, gentlemen," said Raoul, advancing, and, having in his turn drawn his sword, placed it between the combatants; "all this is well, but will scarcely justify your cutting each other's throats almost beneath the eye of the princess. M. de Wardes has spoken ill of M. d'Artagnan; why, he does not even know M. d'Artagnan."

"Ah!" cried De Wardes, grinding his teeth and lowering the point of his sword till it touched his boot, "you say that I do not know M. d'Artagnan?"

"Why no, you do not know him," coolly replied Raoul, "and you are even ignorant as to his place of residence."

"Who I? I know not even where he lives?"

"It must undoubtedly be the case, since you are endeavoring to pick a quarrel with strangers on his account, instead of seeking M. d'Artagnan himself where he is sure to be found."

De Wardes turned pale.

"Well then! I will myself, tell you where to find him," continued Raoul; "M. d'Artagnan is at Paris; he has apartments at the Louvre when on service, and in the Rue des Lombards when not on duty; M. d'Artagnan can very readily be found at one or the other of these two residences. There-

fore, having such injuries to complain of as those which you allege against him, you are not a man of honor if you do not seek him out, to receive that satisfaction from him which you appear to demand from all the world except himself."

De Wardes wiped his forehead which was streaming with perspiration.

"Fie, Monsieur de Wardes," continued Raoul, "it is not becoming in you to be so furious a slasher, when we have edicts against duelling. Reflect upon it; the king would be enraged against us for our disobedience, and above all at such a moment as this, and the king would have good right to be so."

"Mere excuses," muttered De Wardes; "pretexts."

"Come now!" rejoined Raoul, "you are uttering absolute absurdities, my dear Monsieur de Wardes; you know full well that his Grace the Duke of Buckingham is a brave man who has drawn his sword ten times, and would ask no better than to fight the eleventh. He bears a name which compels him to it or the cause is in it! As to myself, you also know full well that I can fight. I fought at Sens, at Bleneau on the Downs, in advance of the artillery, a hundred yards before the line, while you on the contrary, were a hundred yards in the rear. It is true that there were too many there, for your courage to be individually remarked, and that was your reason for concealing it; but here it would be a spectacle, a cause of scandal; you wish to be spoken of, no matter as to the means. Well then, you must not calculate on me, Monsieur de Wardes, to aid you in this project, I will not afford you such a pleasure."

"What you have said is full of reason," said Buckingham, sheathing his sword, "and I ask your pardon, Monsieur de Bragelonne, for having allowed myself to be carried away by a first impulse."

But De Wardes, who on the contrary was more furious than ever, bounded towards Raoul with his sword raised, who had only time to defend himself by a parry *en quarte*.

"Oh! sir," said Bragelonne tranquilly, "take care what you are about, or you will punch out one of my eyes."

"But you will not fight!" exclaimed De Wardes.

"No, not precisely at this moment; but I will promise you thus much immediately after our arrival at Paris;

I will conduct you to M. d'Artagnan to whom you shall state the complaints you have to make against him. M. d'Artagnan will ask permission of the King to run you through. The King will grant his request, and when you have received his sword thrust, why then, my dear monsieur, you will look with a calmer eye on the precepts of the gospel, which command the forgiveness of injuries."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Wardes, rendered furious by this sangfroid, "it is easy to perceive that you are half-bastard, Monsieur de Bragelonne!"

Raoul became as pale as the collar of his shirt; his eyes darted forth such lightnings that De Wardes drew back.

Buckingham himself was dazzled by them, and ran between the two adversaries, whom he expected would rush upon each other.

De Wardes had reserved this insult for the last; he convulsively grasped his sword and waited the attack.

"You are right, sir," said Raoul, making a violent effort to restrain his feelings; "I know only the name of my father; but I know too well that the Count de la Fère is a man of so much probity and honor, that I need not fear even for a moment, as you appear to insinuate, that there is any stain upon my birth. The ignorance in which I have remained as to the name of my mother, is then in my eyes a misfortune only and not an opprobrium. You therefore are deficient in honesty, as well as in courtesy, sir, when you reproach me with this misfortune. But it matters not, the insult exists, and this time I consider myself insulted. Therefore, be it understood that after having settled your quarrel with M. d'Artagnan, you shall, if you please, settle this matter with me."

"Ah! ah!" replied De Wardes with an ironical smile, "I admire your prudence, sir; just now you promised me that M. d'Artagnan should run me through, and it is after I shall have been thus disabled that you offer to have to do with me."

"Do not alarm yourself," replied Raoul, with restrained anger, "Monsieur d'Artagnan is a man of wondrous skill, and I will ask him as a particular favor, to do with you as he did with your father, that is to say, not to kill you outright, in order to afford me the pleasure, when you shall have recovered from your wound, of killing you

more seriously, for you have a bad heart, Monsieur de Wardes, and it would not be possible to use too much precaution with regard to you."

"Sir, I shall take mine against you, be assured," rejoined De Wardes.

"Sir," said Buckingham, "allow me to translate these words by the advice I am about to give to M. de Bragelonne, take care always to wear a coat of mail."

De Wardes clenched his hands.

"Ah! I understand," cried he, "these gentlemen wait until they shall have time to adopt this precaution before venturing to fight with me."

"Come on, sir," said Raoul, "since you will absolutely have it so, let us end it at once."

And he advanced a step towards De Wardes with sword in hand.

"What are you doing?" demanded Buckingham.

"Be not alarmed," said Raoul, "it will not take long."

De Wardes placed himself on guard; the swords were crossed.

De Wardes then rushed precipitately on Raoul, and the latter warding his thrusts with so much coolness that it was evident to Buckingham that Raoul intended merely to defend himself.

Buckingham withdrew a step or two, the better to watch the combat.

Raoul was as calm as if he had been fencing with a foil instead of a pointed weapon; he disengaged his sword which had been crossed up to the hilt by retreating a step, parried two or three lunges which De Wardes had made, then on a feint made by him en quarte which De Wardes parried by the circle, he wound his sword round De Wardes', jerked it from his hold, and sent it flying twenty yards on the outer side of the gate.

Then as De Wardes remained disarmed and perfectly astounded, Raoul sheathed his sword, seized him by the collar of his coat and his waistband, and threw him over the gate, trembling and howling with rage.

"We shall meet again! we shall meet again!" muttered De Wardes, after rising from the ground and picking up his sword.

"By heaven!" said Raoul, "I have been telling you that for the last half hour."

Then turning towards Buckingham, "Duke," said he, "not a word of this to any one, I entreat of you; I am

ashamed at having proceeded to this extremity, but anger got the better of me, and I beg that you will pardon me; forget it."

"Ah! my dear viscount," replied the duke, grasping that hand which was at once so powerful and so loyal, "you will, on the contrary, allow me always to remember it; and to remember it for your safety; that man is dangerous, he will kill you."

"My father," replied Raoul, "has lived twenty years under the threat of an enemy much more fearful, and he is not dead. I am of a race whom God favors, my lord duke."

"Your father had good friends, viscount."

"Yes," said Raoul, "there exist not such friends in these days."

"Oh! say not that, I entreat you, and at the moment when I offer you my friendship."

And Buckingham opened his arms to Raoul, who with joy accepted the offered alliance.

"In my family," added Buckingham, "we die for those we love, you know that, Monsieur de Bragelonne."

"Yes, duke, I know it well," replied Raoul.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT THE CHEVALIER DE LORRAINE THOUGHT OF MADAME.

THE tranquillity of the journey was no more disturbed.

Upon a pretext which did not give rise to much remark, M. de Wardes took himself off and preceded the princess to Paris.

He was accompanied by Manicamp, whose equable and meditative disposition served as a counterpoise to the impetuous and querulous character of De Wardes.

It is to be remarked that quarrelsome and fiery dispositions very frequently associate themselves with mild and timid characters, as if the former sought in the contrast a repose for their ill temper, the latter a defence for their own weakness.

Buckingham and Bragelonne admitted De Guiche into their friendship, and during the whole journey they joined together in continually singing the praises of the princess.

Bragelonne had however so managed

that this concert should be performed in trios instead of proceeding by solos, as De Guiche and his rival would have preferred; but this would have been too dangerous.

This mode of performance much pleased the queen-mother; it was not perhaps quite so much to the taste of the young princess, who was a terrible coquette, and who, having no fear of consequences, seemed to brave every description of danger. She possessed in fact, one of those adventurous and courageous hearts which take delight in encountering perils.

And consequently her smiles, her looks, her magnificent toilettes were inexhaustible projectiles which were showered upon the three young men, piercing them through and through; and from this well stored arsenal issued killing glances, kissing of the hand, and a thousand other delights directed in the distance at the gentlemen of the escort, the citizens, the civic authorities of the towns through, which they passed and pages, populace, and lackeys were not even omitted; it was a universal ravage and devastation.

When Madame arrived at Paris, she had pierced the hearts of a hundred thousand poor young men, who had fallen desperately in love with her, and she brought with her to the capital half a dozen who had lost their wits, and two who were absolutely stark mad.

Raoul alone, divining the danger of the seducing attractions of this lovely person, and this because his heart was filled by another object, and in which there was not a spot that could be assailed by the dart of the wily god, Raoul arrived, cold and distrustful, in the capital of the kingdom.

Sometimes, on the road, he had conversed with the queen of England on the intoxicating charm which Madame spread around her, and "he mother, whose numberless misfortunes and the deceits she had endured, had taught a dearly bought experience, replied to him,

"Henrietta would have been always a most remarkable woman, whether born to a throne or in obscurity; for she possesses imagination, caprice, and great firmness of will."

De Wardes and Manicamp as avant couriers had announced the arrival of the princess. The escort was met at Nanterre by a brilliant crowd of gentlemen and carriages.

It was Monsieur, who, followed by the Chevalier de Lorraine and his favorites, accompanied by a portion of the military household of the king, came to meet and to salute his affianced royal bride.

On arriving at Saint Germain, the princess and her mother had changed their travelling carriage, which was rather heavy and somewhat out of order from the long journey, for an elegant and rich calash drawn by six horses, their harness being white and gold.

In this calash appeared as it were on a throne, beneath a silken canopy, in the shape of a parasol, trimmed with long fringes of feathers, the young and beautiful princess, whose radiant features were tinged with the reflection of the rose colored canopy, and which most admirably enhanced the delicacy of her pearl-like complexion.

Monsieur approaching the carriage was much struck with this brilliancy of beauty, and he expressed his admiration in such explicit terms, that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged up his shoulders in the group of courtiers, and both the Count de Guiche and Buckingham were smitten with despair.

After these compliments had passed and the ceremonial was accomplished, the whole procession moved on towards Paris, but at a more stately pace.

Some presentations had taken place, but in a hurried manner. The Duke of Buckingham had made his bow to Monsieur with the other English noblemen; but the prince had paid but slight attention to these presentations.

But as the Duke of Buckingham continued to remain beside the carriage door of the princess, and showed her the same ardent attention as was habitual with him, the prince turned to the Chevalier de Lorraine, his inseparable companion, and asked him,

"Who is that cavalier?"

"He was presented but a few minutes since to your royal highness. It is the handsome Duke of Buckingham."

"Ah, that is true," said Monsieur.

"The chevalier of Madame," added the favorite with a tone and an expression which the envious alone can give to the most simple phrases.

"How? what do you mean by that?" cried the prince, still riding on.

"I said the chevalier."

"Has Madame then an appointed chevalier?"

"Why, it would appear to me that

you can see it as well as I do. Look at them, laughing and toying together, both of them."

"All three, you should say."

"What do you mean by all three?"

"Undoubtedly, you see de Guiche is of the party."

"Certes, I see that plain enough, but what does that prove? That Madame has two chevaliers instead of one."

"You envenom every thing, viper."

"I envenom nothing—ah! monseigneur what a contradictory temper you possess—here are people doing the honors of the kingdom of France to your wife, and yet you are not satisfied."

The Duke of Orleans feared the satirical vein of the chevalier, whenever he saw it arrive at a certain degree of energy. He therefore broke off abruptly.

"The princess is pretty," he remarked negligently, as if speaking of a stranger.

"Yes," replied the chevalier in the same tone.

"You said that 'Yes,' as if you meant to say, no. She has, it appears to me, very fine black eyes."

"Small."

"That is true, but sparkling. Her figure is good."

"Her figure is somewhat spoiled, monseigneur."

"I do not say it is not—she has a noble air."

"But her face is thin."

"Her teeth appeared to me to be admirable."

"Her mouth is large enough, thank heaven! for one to see them. Decidedly, my lord, I was in the wrong, you are in fact, handsomer than your wife."

"And do you also think that I am handsomer than Buckingham; tell me?"

"Oh! yes, and he feels it too, be assured, for see how he is redoubling his attentions to Madame for fear you should eclipse him."

Monsieur spurred on his horse, but as he saw a smile of triumph playing around the lips of the chevalier, he reined in his steed and put him into a walk.

"And in fact," said he, "why should I occupy myself any longer about my cousin? Do I not know her well? Was I not brought up with her? Did I not see her when she was but a child at the Louvre?"

"Ah! pardon me, my prince, a great change has taken place in her," observed the chevalier. "At the period

of which you speak, she was a little less brilliant—and above all, much less proud—that evening in particular, and you must well remember it, my lord; when the king refused to dance with her, because he thought her ugly, and badly dressed."

These words made the Duke of Orleans knit his brow. It was, in fact, but little flattering to him to marry a princess of whom the king had thought so slightly in her youthful days.

He would perhaps have made some reply had not de Guiche just at that moment left the carriage to accost the prince.

He had observed the prince and the chevalier from a distance, and with anxious ears, had endeavored to divine the words which were being exchanged between Monsieur and his favorite.

The latter, whether from perditionness or imprudence, did not even take the trouble to dissemble.

"Count," said he, "you have good taste."

"Thanks for the compliment," replied de Guiche, "but what is the motive for your saying so?"

"As to that, I appeal to his highness."

"There can be no doubt of it," said Monsieur, "and Guiche well knows that I think him a perfect cavalier."

"That point settled, I resume, count; you have now been with Madame eight days, have you not?"

"Undoubtedly," replied de Guiche, blushing involuntarily.

"Well then, tell us frankly what you think of her person."

"Of her person?" cried de Guiche, quite stupefied.

"Yes, of her person, her mind, of her, in short—"

Astounded at this question, de Guiche hesitated.

"Come now, come now, de Guiche," rejoined the chevalier, laughing, "tell us what you think of her; be frank; Monsieur commands it."

"Yes, yes, be frank," said the prince.

De Guiche stammered out some unintelligible words.

"I know that it is a delicate matter," rejoined Monsieur; "but, in short, you know you can say what you please to me. What do you think of her?"

In order to conceal that which was passing within him, de Guiche had recourse to the only defence which is left to a man when taken by surprise, he lied

"I think madame neither particularly handsome nor particularly plain, but, however, rather good looking than plain.

"Why, dear count, can this be so?" cried the chevalier, "you who were in such ecstasies, and uttered such cries of admiration on seeing her portrait."

De Guiche blushed up to the ears. Fortunately, his horse, which was rather spirited, just at that moment bounded to one side, and enabled him to conceal his blushes.

"The portrait," murmured he, as he spurred his horse towards the prince, "what portrait?"

The chevalier had kept his eyes intently fixed upon him.

"Yes, the portrait. Is the miniature not a faithful likeness?"

"I do not know; I have forgotten the portrait; it has altogether escaped my memory."

"It seemed, however, to make a strong impression on you," remarked the chevalier.

"That is possible."

"Has she wit, at least?" inquired the duke.

"I believe she has, monseigneur."

"And the Duke of Buckingham, is he a man of wit?" inquired the chevalier.

"I do not know."

"For my part, I am of opinion that he must be so," said the chevalier, "for he makes Madame laugh, and she appears to find much pleasure in his society, and that can never happen to a woman of mind, when she finds herself in company with a fool."

"Then I suppose he must be a man of talent," said de Guiche, with great simplicity, to whose rescue Raoul suddenly arrived, for he had observed that he was in discussion with this dangerous interlocutor, whom he immediately drew aside, in order to break off the conversation.

The entrance of the procession into Paris was gay and brilliant. The king in order to do honor to his brother, had ordered that every thing should be on a scale of great magnificence.

The queen-dowager and Madame alighted at the Louvre; that Louvre in which during their years of exile they had so painfully endured obscurity, misery, and humiliating privations.

That palace which had been so inhospitable to the unfortunate daughter of Henry IV., whose naked walls, dilapidated floors, its ceilings tapestried

with spiders' webs, its vast marble chimney-pieces chipped and cracked, its cold hearths, which even the constrained charity of the parliament had scarcely warmed for them—all this had undergone a marvellous change.

Splendid draperies, thick velvet carpets, shining tiles, new paintings in massive gilt frames, and in every room candelabras, looking-glasses, and sumptuous furniture. In every direction were seen guards with a proudly martial deportment, with gay nodding plumes, a whole nation of courtiers, valets and pages in the waiting-rooms and on the staircases.

In those court-yards where formerly grew the long rank grass, as if that ungrateful Mazarin had thought it expedient to prove to the Parisians that solitude and disorder united with misery and despair ought to be the retinue of fallen royalty; in those immense court-yards, formerly so mute and desolate, were now parading hundreds of cavaliers, whose horses' hoofs struck millions of brilliant sparks from the ere while never trodden pavement.

Carriages full of young and beautiful women, were waiting in order to greet, on her passing by, the daughter of that daughter of France, who during her widowhood and exile, had sometimes not been able to procure a log of wood for her hearth, nor a piece of bread to put on her table, and who was disdained by even the lowest servants of the palace.

And thus the queen-dowager of England on returning to the Louvre, re-entered its portals with a heart more impressed by bitter and agonizing recollections than that of her daughter was with joy and triumph—the latter was of a more variable and forgetful disposition.

The queen felt that this brilliant reception was intended for the fortunate mother of a king restored to the second crown of Europe, while the miserable treatment she had formerly experienced was directed personally to her, the daughter of Henry IV., punished for having been unfortunate.

After the queen and the princess had been installed in their apartments, after they had taken some repose, the men who had also recovered from their fatigue, resumed their usual occupations.

Bragelonne began by going to pay a visit to his father; but Athos had left the capital for Blois.

He then endeavored to see Monsieur d'Artagnan, but the latter being occupied in reorganizing the military household of the king, was nowhere to be found.

Bragelonne then fell back upon de Guiche.

But the count had such serious conferences with his tailors and with Manicamp, that his whole time was completely taken up.

It was worse still with the Duke of Buckingham, who bought horses upon horses, diamonds upon diamonds. All the embroiderers, the lapidaries, the tailors to be found in Paris, were monopolized by him. A combat, more or less courteous, had commenced between the duke and de Guiche, for the success of which Buckingham was willing to expend a million, while on the other side, the Marshal de Grammont had given only sixty thousand livres to his son, de Guiche.

Buckingham laughed, and spent his million.

Guiche sighed, and would have torn his hair out by the roots, but for the counsels of de Wardes.

"A million!" would de Guiche exclaim at least twenty times a day; "I must be vanquished. Why will not the Marshal advance me at once a good round sum on my inheritance?"

"Because," said Raoul, who happened to step in just a moment before, "you would devour it all."

"And of what consequence would that be to him if I am to die of this; I shall die; and then I shall want nothing more."

"But what necessity is there for dying?" asked Raoul.

"I will not be outdone in elegance by an Englishman."

"My dear count," observed Manicamp, in an affectionate tone, "elegance is not necessarily costly, it is merely difficult."

"Yes, but difficult matters always are of great cost, and I have only sixty thousand livres."

"Zounds," cried de Wardes, "I see no reason for all this embarrassment; spend as much as Buckingham does, the difference between you is only nine hundred and forty thousand livres."

"And where am I to get them?"

"Run into debt."

"I have done that already."

"A still more weighty reason."

All these opinions at last so much excited de Guiche that he ran into

extravagant follies, while Buckingham only expended his spare cash.

The rumors of all these prodigalities made the faces of all the shopkeepers of Paris beam with joy, and from the hotel inhabited by Buckingham to the Hôtel de Grammont nothing else was spoken of.

During this time Madame was resting herself, and Bragelonne was writing to Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

Four letters had been already traced by his pen and not a single answer had arrived, when on the morning the marriage ceremony was to be solemnized, and which was to take place in the chapel of the Palais Royal, Raoul, who was finishing his toilette, heard his valet announce,

"Monsieur de Malicorne."

"What can this Malicorne want with me?" thought Raoul, "tell him to wait."

"It is a gentleman from Blois," said the valet.

"Ah!" cried Raoul, eagerly, "let him come in."

Malicorne entered the room, brilliant as a star, and wearing a superb sword.

After having bowed very gracefully, "Monsieur de Bragelonne," said he, "I am charged to offer you a thousand civilities on the part of a lady."

Raoul blushed.

"Of a lady!" said he, "a lady from Blois."

"Yes, sir, it is Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah! thank you, sir, I recollect you now. And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais desire from me?"

Malicorne drew from his pocket four letters, which he presented to Raoul.

"My letters! can it be possible?" cried he, changing color, "my letters, and the seals not broken!"

"Sir, these letters did not find the person at Blois for whom they were destined; they are therefore returned to you."

"Has Mademoiselle de la Vallière left Blois?" cried Raoul.

"Eight days ago, sir."

"And where is she?"

"She must be in Paris, Sir."

"But how could it be known that these letters were from me?"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your hand-writing and your seal," replied Malicorne.

Raoul blushed and smiled.

"It is very obliging of Mademoiselle

Aure," said he, "she is always kind and charming."

"Always, sir."

"She ought really to have given me some more precise information with regard to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I shall not be able to find her in the immensity of Paris."

Malicorne drew from his pocket another package.

"Perhaps, sir, you will find in this letter, that which you desire to know."

Raoul eagerly broke the seal.

It was in Mademoiselle Aure's handwriting, and the following were the contents of the letter.

"Palais Royal, Paris, the day of the nuptial benediction."

"What does this mean?" inquired Raoul of Malicorne, "do you know, sir?"

"Yes, viscount."

"I pray you tell me then."

"That it is impossible, sir."

"And why?"

"Because Mademoiselle Aure has forbidden me to tell you."

Raoul looked at this singular personage, and remained silent.

"At all events," said he, "say whether it is any thing fortunate or unfortunate."

"You will see."

"You are severe in your discretion."

"One favor, sir."

"In exchange for the one you will not grant to me?"

"Precisely so."

"Speak."

"I have the most eager desire to be present at the ceremony; but I have no admission ticket, notwithstanding all the measures I have taken to procure one. Could you gain me admission?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, then, do this for me, sir. I entreat you."

"I will do it willingly, sir. You shall accompany me."

"Sir, I am your most humble servant."

"I thought you were a friend of M. de Manicamp."

"I am so sir; but this morning when with him, while he was dressing, I had the misfortune to let fall a bottle of varnish on his new coat, and he charged upon me, sword in hand, in so furious a manner, that I was compelled to take to my heels. That is the reason I did not ask him

for a ticket; he would have killed me."

"That is readily conceived," said Raoul, "I know Manicamp capable of killing a man unfortunate enough to have committed the crime with which you have to reproach yourself. But I will repair the evil as far as you are concerned; I will just hook my cloak, and then shall be ready to serve you as a guide and introducer."

CHAPTER IX.

MADMOISELLE DE MONTALAIS' PLOT.

MADAME was married in the chapel of the Palais Royal, before a world of courtiers, very scrupulously selected. Yet notwithstanding the high favor which the receipt of an invitation indicated, Raoul, faithful to his promise, obtained admission for Malicorne, who was so very desirous of witnessing this splendid spectacle.

When he had fulfilled this engagement, Raoul placed himself near de Guiche, who, as a contrast to his splendid costume, wore a visage so completely woe-begone, that the Duke of Buckingham alone could rival him in blanched cheeks and despondency.

"Take care, count," whispered Raoul to his friend, and preparing himself to support him at the moment when the archbishop should pronounce his benediction on the married couple.

And, indeed, the Prince de Condé might be observed gazing with curious eyes upon these two images of despair, who were standing like two Cariatides, one on each side of the nave.

After this the count was more careful as to the expression of his features.

When the ceremony was terminated, the king and the queen went into the great drawing-room, where Madame and her suite were presented to them.

It was observed that the king, who had appeared perfectly astonished on seeing his sister-in-law, offered her the most sincere congratulations.

It was observed that the queen-mother, casting on Buckingham a long and pensive look, leaned toward Madame de Motteville, saying to her—

"Do you not think he much resembles his father?"

I was observed that Monsieur observed every body, and appeared somewhat discontented.

After the reception of the princes and ambassadors, Monsieur requested the king's permission to present to him as well as to Madame the persons forming his new household.

"Do you know, viscount," said the Prince de Condé to Raoul, "if the household has been selected by a person of good taste, and whether we shall have some tolerably decent faces to look at?"

"I am altogether ignorant on that subject," replied Raoul.

"Oh! you are playing ignorance."

"How can that be, Monseigneur?"

"You are the friend of Guiche, who is one of the princes' friends."

"That is true, Monseigneur; but as the matter did not interest me I did not ask Guiche a single question, and on the other side, Guiche, not being questioned, did not speak to me upon it."

"But Manicamp?"

"It is true that I saw Manicamp at Havre and on the road, but I was careful to be as little inquisitive towards him as I had been with Guiche. Besides, could M. Manicamp know any thing of all this, he who is only a secondary personage?"

"Why, my dear viscount! what strange land come you from?" exclaimed Monsieur le Prince. "Why, it is always these secondary personages who on such occasions are all powerful, and the proof of this is, that almost all have been selected by the presentation of M. Manicamp to Guiche, and then by Guiche to Monsieur."

"Well, then, monseigneur, I was perfectly ignorant of all this, and it is news which your highness does me the honor to first acquaint me with."

"I will believe it, although it is incredible; and moreover, we shall not have long to wait; the flying squadron is now advancing, as the good Queen Catherine used to say. Jupiter! what pretty faces."

A troop of young ladies were in fact advancing into the room, led on by Madame de Navailles, and we cannot but admit, to Manicamp's honor, if indeed he had played the part in this selection attributed to him by the Prince de Condé, it was a sight to enchant the eyes of those who, like Monsieur le Prince, were appreciators of every style of female beauty.

A young fair haired lady, who might be from twenty to twenty-one years of age, whose large blue eyes, when opening, darted dazzling flames, walked first, and was the first to be presented.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente," said old Madame de Navailles, presenting her to Monsieur.

And Monsieur repeated, bowing to Madame,

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente."

"Ah! ah! this one appears to me tolerably agreeable," said Monsieur la Prince, turning toward Raoul, "that is one."

"In fact, she is pretty," observed Raoul, "although she has rather a haughty air."

"Pooh! we understand those airs, viscount. In three months she will be tamed. But look, here is another beauty."

"Ah!" cried Raoul, "and a beauty I am acquainted with."

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," said Madame de Navailles.

Names and Christian names were scrupulously repeated by Monsieur.

"Gracious heaven!" cried Raoul, fixing his astonished eyes upon the door.

"What is the matter?" inquired the prince, "can it be Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais who has caused you to ejaculate such a 'gracious heaven?'"

"No monseigneur," replied Raoul, all pale and trembling.

"Then if it is not Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, it is that charming fair young lady who is following her. Beautiful eyes i'faith; rather thin; but very charming."

"Mademoiselle de la Beaume le Blanc de la Vallière," said Madame de Navailles.

On hearing that name which vibrated to the very bottom of Raoul's heart, a cloud rose from his breast to his eyes.

So that he could see nothing more, could hear nothing more, and the prince finding in him no echo to his railleries, moved nearer to examine those beautiful young girls, whom his first glance had already so much approved.

"Louise here! Louise maid of honor to Madame!" murmured Raoul.

And his eyes, which sufficed not to convince his reason, wandered from Louise to Montalais.

Moreover the latter had already cast off her borrowed timidity, a timidity which was intended only to serve her at the moment of presentation, and while making her obeisance.

Mademoiselle de Montalais, from a corner of the room to which she had withdrawn, was looking with tolerable

assurance at all the persons present, and having discovered Raoul among the crowd, she was amusing herself with the astonishment into which her presence and that of her friend, had thrown the poor love-stricken youth.

That cunning, mocking, sarcastic eye which Raoul wished to avoid, and which was incessantly interrogating him, was torture to poor Raoul.

As to Louise, whether from natural timidity, or from any other cause, for which Raoul could not account, her eyes were constantly cast down, and intimidated, dazzled, she had retired as far into the corner as she could, impassible even to the appeals of the elbow of Montalais.

All this was to Raoul a positive enigma, and the poor viscount would have given much to have it solved.

But there was no one who could give him the solution, not even Malicorne, who, rather uneasy at finding himself among so many great noblemen, and somewhat alarmed by the mocking glances of Montalais, had described a circle, and by degrees had advanced to within a few steps of the place where the Prince de Condé was standing near the maids of honor, and almost within hearing of the voice of Montalais, the planet around which, as an humble satellite he seemed compelled to gravitate.

When Raoul came to himself he thought he heard some voices that were known to him to his left.

And in fact, they were those of de Wardes, de Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine.

It is true that they were talking in so low a tone, that even the murmur of their words was scarcely heard in that vast drawing-room.

To speak thus to each other, standing upright, without in the least leaning towards each other, without even looking at the person they were addressing, was a talent, of which persons unused to the court could not attain the sublimity until after much practice. It required a long study of such conversations, which without looking, without the slightest movement of the head, appeared the conversation of a group of statues.

But Raoul was one of the adepts in this study, altogether one of etiquette, and by the mere movement of the lips he could often guess the meaning of the words.

"What the deuce is this Montalais?" inquired de Wardes, "who is that la

Vallière? What means all this provincial troop that is invading us?"

"La Montalais," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, "I know her; she is an excellent girl, who will amuse the court. La Vallière is a charming girl, who limps."

"Pheugh!" said de Wardes.

"Do not speak so slightly of her de Wardes: there are some very ingenious Latin axioms with regard to limping women, and which are above all, extremely characteristic."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said de Guiche, anxiously observing Raoul, "be more guarded, I beg of you."

But the uneasiness of the count, to all appearance at least, was superfluous. Raoul's countenance had remained altogether impassible, although he had not lost a word of all that had been said. He appeared to register all the impertinences and the liberties of the two calumniators in order to bring them to account for them at a fitting opportunity.

De Wardes no doubt divined this thought, for he continued,

"Who are the lovers of these young ladies?"

"Of la Montalais?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, of la Montalais, in the first place."

"Why, you, myself, Guiche, any one who pleases, by heaven!"

"And of the other?"

"Of Mademoiselle de la Vallière!"

"Yes."

"Take care, gentlemen," cried Guiche, in order to prevent the answer to de Wardes' question, "take care, Madame is listening to us."

Raoul plunged his hand into his doublet, and tore the lace frill which he wore.

But this propensity, this fury of attacking the reputation of helpless women, made him adopt a serious resolution.

"That poor Louise," said he, to himself, "came here but with an honorable intention, and under an honorable protection, but I must know to what end she came, and under whose protection."

And imitating Malicorne's manoeuvre, he directed his steps toward the group of maids of honor.

The presentation was soon over. The king who had not ceased gazing at, and admiring Madame, left the receiving room with the two queens.

The Chevalier de Lorraine resumed his place by the side of Monsieur, and while accompanying him distilled into his ear some drops of the poison he had been accumulating during an hour, from looking at new faces and suspecting that some of them were accompanied by happy hearts.

The king on retiring had drawn after him a good portion of the courtiers, but those among them who wished to be considered independent or men of gallantry, began to approach the ladies.

Monsieur le Prince complimented Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, Buckingham paid his court to Madame de Chalais and to Madame de Lafayette, whom Madame had already distinguished and was pleased with. As to the Count de Guiche abandoning Monsieur as soon as he could approach Madame, he was conversing earnestly with Madame de Valentinois, his sister, and with Mesdemoiselle de Crequy and de Chatillon.

In the midst of all these political and amorous interests Malicorne wished to monopolize Montalais,—but the latter preferred conversing with Raoul, were it only to enjoy all his questions and his great surprise.

Raoul had gone at once to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and had bowed to her with the most profound respect.

On seeing which Louise blushed and stammered, but Montalais hastened to her assistance.

"Well," said she, "viscount, here we are."

"I see that clearly," replied Raoul, smiling, "but 'tis precisely on your presence here that I have come to ask some little explanation."

Malicorne advanced with his most bewitching smile.

"Stand further off, Monsieur Malicorne," said Montalais, "you are really extremely indiscreet."

Malicorne bit his lips, but retired a couple of paces without uttering a word.

Only his smile changed its expression, instead of being an open honest smile, it became sarcastic.

"You wished for an explanation, Monsieur Raoul?" inquired Montalais.

"Certainly; the matter, it seems to me, is well worth the while; Mademoiselle de la Vallière, maid of honor to Madame!"

"And why should she not be a maid of honor as well as I am?" asked Montalais.

"Receive my congratulations, young ladies," said Raoul, who thought that he perceived they did not wish to reply directly to him.

"You say that in a very complimentary style, good viscount."

"Who, I?"

"Well, I appeal to Louise."

"M. de Bragelonne, perhaps thinks," said Louise, stammering, "that the place is above my condition."

"Oh! by no means," eagerly replied Raoul, "You well know that such are not my sentiments; it would not surprise me were you to occupy the place of a queen, and with more reason such a place as this. The only thing which astonishes me is, that I should have been apprised of it but to day, and that only by accident."

"Ah! that is true," cried Montalais, with her habitual giddiness, "you do not understand a word of all this, and in truth, you cannot understand it; M. de Bragelonne, had written you four letters, but your mother had alone remained at Blois; it was necessary to prevent these letters from falling into her hands, I intercepted them and returned them to M. Raoul; so that he believed you to be still at Blois, when you were in Paris, and above all did not know you had acquired this new dignity."

"What did you not then inform M. Raoul of it, as I had requested you?" exclaimed Louise.

"Oh! I dare say! in order that he should be austere, and pronounce some of his sage maxims; that he might undo all that we had so much trouble to accomplish? No, by no means."

"I am very severe then?" said Raoul interrogatively.

"Besides," said Montalais, "it suited me to manage it in this way. I was about to set off for Paris; you were not there, Louise was weeping bitterly from morning till night; you may interpret this as you please. I begged my protector, the one who had obtained my appointment for me, to ask for one for Louise; the diploma arrived; Louise set out for the purpose of ordering her new dresses, I remained at Blois having mine already. I received your letters; I sent them back to you adding a few words which promised you some startling event. And the event has indeed surprised you, my dear sir; my plot has succeeded admirably, and therefore ask me nothing more. Come, Monsieur Malicorne, it

is time we should leave these young people together; they have a host of things to say to each other. Your hand, sir, I hope this is a great honor done to you, M. Malicorne."

"Your pardon, mademoiselle," said Raoul, detaining the madcap girl, and giving to his words an intonation of which the seriousness contrasted strangely with the levity of Montalais; "pardon, but may I know the name of this protector; for if you have been patronized, and doubtless from good reason," Raoul bowed, "I do not see there were the same reasons for patronizing Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Good heaven! Monsieur Raoul," said Louise ingenuously, "the thing is very simple, and I see no reason why I should not myself tell it you. My protector is—M. Malicorne."

Raoul remained for a moment stupefied, asking himself if they were not laughing at him, and then turned round to interrogate Malicorne.

But the latter was already at some distance, having been dragged away by Montalais.

Mademoiselle de la Vallière made a movement to follow her friend, but Raoul with gentle authority compelled her to remain.

"I entreat you, Louise, only one word," said he.

"But, Monsieur Raoul," said Louise, blushing, "we are alone, every body is gone; they will be uneasy, they will send in search of us."

"Oh! fear nothing," said the young man, smiling, "we are neither of us sufficiently important personages to cause our absence to be remarked."

"But my service, Monsieur Raoul?"

"Make yourself perfectly easy, mademoiselle," said Raoul. "I know the customs of the court. Your service commences only to-morrow. You have, therefore, a few minutes to spare, during which you may give me the explanation which I am about to have the honor of requesting."

"How serious you are, M. Raoul," said Louise anxiously.

"It is because the circumstance is serious, mademoiselle; are you listening to me?"

"I am listening to you; only, sir, I repeat that we are completely alone here."

"You are right," said Raoul.

And offering her his hand, he led the young lady into the gallery leading from the drawing-room, the windows of which opened upon the square.

All the courtiers had flocked to the centre window, which had an exterior gallery whence could be seen the equipages of the nobility as they slowly drove away.

Raoul opened one of the side windows, and there being alone with Mademoiselle de la Vallière:

"Louise," said he, "you know that from my earliest childhood I have loved you as a sister, and that you are the confidant of all my sorrows, the depository of all my hopes."

"Yes," she replied in a low tone, "yes, Monsieur Raoul, I know that."

"On your side, it was usual with you to testify towards me the same friendship, the same confidence; why in this present meeting have you not been my friend, why was it that you mistrusted me?"

La Vallière did not reply.

"I have believed you loved me," continued Raoul, whose voice became more and more trembling, "I thought you had consented to all the plans we had mutually arranged for our happiness, in those days when we walked together in the extensive avenues of Cheverny, and beneath the poplars that line the road leading to Blois—you do not answer me, Louise?"

He paused.

"Can it be," cried he, almost breathless with emotion, "that you no longer love me?"

"I do not say that," replied Louise, in an almost inaudible whisper.

"Oh! tell me so at once, if it be really so, I entreat you. I have founded every hope of my life in you; I chose you for your sweet and unaffected manners. Do not allow yourself to be dazzled, Louise, now that you are in the midst of a court, where every thing that is pure becomes corrupt; where every thing that is young quickly becomes old. Louise, close your ears that you may not hear the words pronounced here, shut your eyes that you may not see the examples, open not your lips that you may not inhale the corrupting atmosphere. Without subterfuge, without equivocation, tell me, Louise, may I believe the words of Mademoiselle de Montalais, did you come to Paris because I was no longer at Blois?"

La Vallière blushed and concealed her face with her hands.

"Yes, it was so, was it not?" cried Raoul, exultingly, "Yes, it was on that account you came! Oh! I love you as

I have never yet loved you! Thanks! thanks! Louise for this devotedness! but I must take measures to shelter you from every species of insult, to secure you from every sort of stain. Louise, a maid of honor at the court of a young princess, in these days of levity and inconstancy; a maid of honor becomes the very centre of attack, deprived of all defence. Such a condition is unsuitable to you, you must be married in order to be respected."

"Married?"

"Yes, married!"

"Good heavens!"

"Here is my hand, Louise, let yours fall into it."

"But your father?"

"My father leaves me at liberty."

"And yet—"

"I understand this scruple, Louise! I will consult my father."

"Oh! Monsieur Raoul, reflect, wait!"

"To wait is impossible. Reflect? when you are in danger—it would be insulting to you. Your hand, dear Louise, I am my own master; my father will say yes, I promise you; your hand; do not allow me thus to wait. Reply, if but one word; one word only. If you do not I shall imagine that to produce so great a change, one single step in this palace, one breath of favor, one smile from the queen, one single glance from the king has sufficed—"

Raoul had scarcely pronounced the word king, when la Vallière became pale as death, and no doubt from the fear that Raoul would become too agitated, by a movement rapid as thought itself, she placed both her hands in those of Raoul.

Then she fled from him without adding a single word, and disappeared without once looking back.

Raoul felt a thrill rush through his veins at the contact of those hands.

He received the vow as a solemn pledge torn by faithful love from virginal timidity.

CHAPTER X.

THE CONSENT OF ATHOS.

RAOUL had left the Palais Royal with ideas that admitted of no delay as to their execution.

He therefore mounted his horse in

the court-yard, and at once took the road that led to Blois, while the festivities attending the nuptials of Monsieur with the princess royal of England were being carried on, to the great delight of the courtiers generally, and to the utter despair of de Guiche and Buckingham.

Raoul lost no time on his journey; in eighteen hours he had arrived at Blois.

On the road he had been studying over his most convincing arguments.

Fever is also an argument to which there is no reply, and Raoul was possessed by a fever.

Athos was in his study, adding a few pages to his memoirs, when Raoul entered it, conducted by Grimaud.

The clear-sighted nobleman needed but a glance to perceive that there was something extraordinary in the demeanor of his son.

"You appear to me to have come," said he, after having embraced Raoul, "on an affair of some importance?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young man, "and I entreat you to lend me that kind attention which has never yet failed me."

"Speak, Raoul."

"Sir, the following is the fact, stripped of every description of preamble unworthy of a man like you. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is at Paris, filling the station of maid of honor to Madame: I have examined my heart thoroughly, I love Mademoiselle de la Vallière beyond all, and it does not conform with my ideas to allow her to remain in a position where her reputation, her virtue may be exposed to attack; I therefore desire to marry her, sir, and I have come to ask your consent to this marriage."

During this communication, Athos had remained altogether silent and reserved.

Raoul had begun his harangue with an affectation of sangfroid, but he had concluded it by exhibiting at every word the most intense emotion.

Athos fixed on Raoul a penetrating look veiled by a certain degree of sorrow.

"You have then maturely reflected?" inquired he.

"Yes, sir."

"I thought I had already expressed to you my sentiments with regard to this alliance."

"I am aware of that," replied Raoul, in a low tone, "but you also said that if I insisted—"

"And you do insist?"

Bragelonne stammered out a "yes," which was almost inaudible.

"Your passion must indeed be very strong, sir," continued Athos, "since, notwithstanding my repugnance to this union you still appear to desire it."

Raoul pressed a trembling hand to his forehead, and then wiped off the perspiration which was streaming from it.

Athos looked at him and his heart was moved with some compassion for him.

He rose from his chair.

"Tis well!" said he, "my personal sentiments are of no importance, since yours are now in question. You have need of me, I am at your service. But come now, tell me, what is it you desire of me?"

"Oh! your indulgence sir," cried Raoul, seizing his hands, "your indulgence, most of all."

"You are mistaken, Raoul, with regard to my feeling towards you—there are better ones than that in my heart," replied the count.

Raoul kissed his hands, as might have done the most impassioned lover.

"Come, come, Raoul," said Athos, "tell me what is it you wish me to sign?"

"Oh! nothing, sir, nothing; only it might be well, that you should take the trouble to write to the king, and to ask permission of his majesty, whose servant I now am, to marry Made-moiselle de la Vallière."

"You have a good idea, Raoul. Indeed, after myself, or rather before myself, you have a master, and that master is the king. You therefore, involuntarily submit yourself to a double trial—that is loyal."

"Oh! monsieur!"

"I will instantly acquiesce in your demand, Raoul."

The count approached a window and leaning out of it,

"Grimaud!" cried he.

Grimaud put his head out of a jessamine bower which he was pruning.

"My horses!" continued the count.

"What does that order mean, sir?" inquired Raoul.

"That we shall set out in two hours."

"And for what place?"

"For Paris."

"How! for Paris? You will come to Paris, sir?"

"Is not the king at Paris?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well then, must we not go there? Surely you have lost your senses."

"But, sir," cried Raoul, almost alarmed at this paternal condescension, "I did not mean that you should be so much inconvenienced, a mere letter—"

"Raoul, you deceive yourself with regard to my importance; it would not be decorous, that a plain gentleman, such as I am, should write to his king. It is my duty to wait upon the king, and I will do so; we will set out together, Raoul."

"Oh! what goodness, sir!"

"How do you think his majesty feels disposed towards you?"

"Toward me, sir?"

"Yes."

"Oh! perfectly well."

"Has he told you so?"

"With his own lips."

"On what occasion?"

"Upon the recommendation of Monsieur d'Artagnan, with regard to an affair on the Place de Grève, where I had the honor to draw my sword for his majesty. I have therefore, and without vanity, reason to suppose that I stand well in his majesty's opinion."

"So much the better! so much the better!"

"But I conjure you," cried Raoul, "do not retain towards me that serious and constrained air, this reserve. Do not compel me to regret that I should have yielded to a feeling, more powerful than any other—"

"This is the second time that you have spoken of this, Raoul; it was not necessary. You wish the formality of a consent; you have obtained it; let us say no more upon the subject. Come and see my new plantations, Raoul."

The young man knew that when the count had once pronounced his will, it would be useless to attempt to controvert it.

He bowed his head and followed his father into the garden.

Athos showed him his newly planted walks, his graftings, and some young saplings he had planted.

This tranquillity more and more disconcerted Raoul. The love which filled his heart seemed to him so great, that the whole world was scarcely wide enough to contain it.

How was it that the heart of Athos could remain void and shut against its influence.

And therefore Raoul, summoning all his energy, suddenly exclaimed,

"Sir, it is impossible that you should

not have some potent reason for thus repelling Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Gracious heaven! she who is so good, so gentle, so pure, that your mind, so sublimely wise, ought to appreciate her at her true value! Can there exist between you and her family some secret enmity, some hereditary hatred?"

"Look Raoul, what a beautiful bed of lilies of the valley; see, how luxuriantly they grow beneath this shade, and in this tranquil spot. The shade, above all, of these sycamores, through whose leaves filter the heat but not the scorching rays of the sun—"

Raoul paused, and bit his lips, but feeling the blood rising to his temples:

"Sir," said he, boldly, "I entreat you give me an explanation. You cannot forget that your son is a man."

"Then," said Athos, drawing himself up austere, "then prove to me that you are a man, for you have not proved that you are a son. I had requested you to await the time for an illustrious alliance. I would have found for you a wife among the rich nobility. I wished you to shine with the double splendor that glory combined with riches can impart. You have nobility of birth."

"Sire," cried Raoul, carried away by a fierce impulse, "it was but the other day that I was reproached with not having known my mother."

Athos turned pale, and then frowning like the sovereign of Olympus—

"I am waiting, impatiently," said he, majestically, "to know what reply you made."

"Oh! pardon—pardon!" cried the young man, his exaltation at once abandoning him.

"What did you reply, sir?" cried the count, stamping his foot.

"Sir, I had my sword in my hand; the man who insulted me had his drawn also; I sent his sword flying over a palisade, and then I threw him over it to rejoin his sword."

"And why did you not kill him?"

"His majesty has forbidden duelling, sir, and at that moment I was the ambassador of his majesty."

"'Tis well!" said Athos, "but that is a further reason for my going to speak to his majesty."

"And what will you ask of him, sir?"

"His authorization to draw my sword against the man who has thus insulted me."

"Sir, if I have not acted as I ought

to have acted I entreat that you will pardon me."

"And who reproaches you, Raoul?"

"But this permission that you wish to ask of the king?"

"Raoul, I will ask his majesty to sign your marriage contract."

"Sir,—"

"But on one condition—"

"Do you need any condition where I am concerned? You have only to command, sir, I will obey."

"On the condition," continued Athos, "that you will tell me the name of him who spoke thus of your mother."

"But, sir, what need have you to know his name? It was against me the offence was committed, and when once his majesty's permission shall be obtained, to avenge it is my concern."

"His name, sir!"

"I will not allow you thus to expose yourself."

"Do you take me for a Don Diego?"

"His name, I say!"

"You exact it?"

"I insist on knowing it."

"The Marquis de Wardes."

"Oh!" said Athos, calmly, "'tis well, I know him; but our horses are ready, sir; instead of setting out in two hours, we will be off at once. To horse, sir! to horse!"

CHAPTER XI.

MONSIEUR IS JEALOUS OF THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

Four days after the marriage, a scene took place in the Palais Royal, which Molière would have thought worthy of one of his best comedies.

Monsieur having breakfasted very hurriedly, went into the ante-chambers with pouting lips and frowning brow.

The repast had not been gay. Madame had ordered her breakfast to be served in her own apartment.

Monsieur had therefore breakfasted almost alone.

The Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp were the only persons with him: the breakfast lasted three quarters of an hour, during which not a word was uttered.

Manicamp, who was much less intimate with his royal highness than the Chevalier de Lorraine, in vain endeavored to read in the eyes of the prince the cause of his ill-temper.

The Chevalier de Lorraine, who had

no need of attempting to divine this cause, seeing that he knew the whole affair, ate his breakfast with that extraordinary appetite which the annoyance of others always excited in him, and enjoyed at the same moment the vexation of Monsieur and the consternation of Manicamp.

He felt great delight in compelling the prince, who was burning with impatience and desire, to raise the siege, to remain at table.

Sometimes Monsieur would bitterly repent having allowed the Chevalier de Lorraine to obtain such an ascendancy over him, and which exempted him from all sort of etiquette.

Monsieur was just then in one of those humors, but he feared the chevalier almost as much as he liked him, and he therefore inwardly devoured his rage.

From time to time Monsieur raised his eyes to heaven, then lowered them again to the slices of partridge pie, to which the chevalier helped himself, and at length, not daring to break out, he gave himself up to pantomimic gestures of which even Harlequin himself might have been jealous.

At last Monsieur, when the fruit was put on table, could withstand it no longer, and jumping up in a perfect rage, left the Chevalier de Lorraine to discuss the remainder of his breakfast as he might think fit.

On seeing Monsieur rise from the table Manicamp rose also, upright as a soldier, his table-napkin in his hand.

Monsieur ran rather than walked into the ante-chamber, and finding there an usher gave him an order in a whisper.

Then returning, he avoided re-entering the breakfast-room by going through some side-passages, as he had determined on at once seeing the queen-mother in her oratory, where she was generally to be found.

It may have been somewhere about ten o'clock.

Anne of Austria was writing when Monsieur entered the room.

The queen mother was very fond of this son, who had a handsome face, and was of gentle disposition.

Monsieur was in fact more affectionate and it may be said more effeminate than the king.

He had gained the heart of his mother by little tender attentions, which are always pleasing to women. Anne of Austria, who would have much

liked to have a daughter, had received from this son those caresses and trifling endearments which she might have expected from a young girl.

Thus, Monsieur spent nearly the whole of his time, when with his mother, in admiring her beautiful arms, in giving her advice as to her pastes and receipts for her essences, in which she was extremely choice; then he would kiss her hands and eyes with charming childishness, had always some sweetmeats to offer her, some new fashion to recommend.

Anne of Austria loved the king, or rather the kingly state in her eldest son: to her Louis XIV. was the representative of divine legitimacy. She was queen-mother with the king, she was but the mother alone with Philippe.

And the latter knew that of all shelters the bosom of a mother was the sweetest and the safest, and often when quite a child would he run there for refuge when storms had arisen between his brother and himself; after they had been at fisticuffs together, which on his part constituted a crime of no less a degree than that of high treason, after long battles with fists and nails, which the king and his very unsubmissive subject would fight, they being in their shirts and in bed, having Laporte the valet de chambre as sole umpire of the combat, Philippe though conqueror, would be alarmed at his own victory, and fly to his mother for a reinforcement, or at all events for the assurance of forgiveness, which Louis XIV. would grant but with difficulty, and after a lapse of some time.

Anne had succeeded through this habit of pacific intervention in conciliating all the differences which arose between her sons, and at the same time became the depository of all their secrets.

The king rather jealous of this maternal solicitude, which was extended more particularly to his brother, was in consequence induced to evince more submission and more attention than his disposition would otherwise have dictated.

Anne of Austria had more particularly practised this system of policy towards the young queen.

And therefore was it that she reigned almost despotically over the royal couple, and she was preparing all her batteries to reign as absolutely over the family concerns of her second son.

Anne of Austria was almost proud of seeing any of them apply to her with a long face, pale cheeks, and reddened eyes, for then she at once understood that her aid was required either by the weaker or the more petulant of the parties.

She was, as we have said, writing when Monsieur entered her oratory, but not with reddened eyes and pallid cheeks, but uneasy, irritated, and annoyed.

He absently kissed his mother's arm, and seated himself without waiting her authority to do so.

Considering the minute observance of etiquette established at the court of Anne of Austria, this forgetfulness of decorum was a sure sign of momentary aberration, above all on the part of Philippe, who usually attended scrupulously to every minutiae of respectful adulation.

But if he were thus flagrantly deficient in the observance of those forms which had become almost a principle with him, the cause of this neglect must indeed be serious.

"What is the matter with you, Philippe?" inquired Anne of Austria, turning towards her son.

"Ah! madam, many things," murmured the prince in a piteous tone.

"You have in fact the appearance of a man who is seriously preoccupied," said the queen, placing her pen in the inkstand.

Philippe knit his brows, but did not reply.

"But among all these things which weigh upon your mind, there must be one in particular which occupies it more than the rest."

"Yes, madam, that is true, there is one which engrosses my attention more particularly."

"I am all attention."

Philippe opened his lips to give utterance to all the complaints which he had harbored in his mind, and which were awaiting but an opportunity to find a vent.

But he suddenly paused, and all his heartfelt pains were summed up in one long drawn sigh.

"Come now, Philippe, come; be firm," said the queen-mother; "when we have a complaint to make of any thing, it is generally of some person who has annoyed us, is it not?"

"I do not say that, madam."

"Of whom then would you speak? come, come, be more yourself."

"Why, really, madam, that which I have to say is of so delicate a nature—"

"Ah! good heaven!"

"Undoubtedly, for a—in short madam, a woman—"

"Ah! you would speak to me of Madame?" asked the queen, with a lively feeling of curiosity.

"Of Madame?"

"Of your wife, in short."

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"Well then, if it be of your wife you wish to speak to me, you need feel no sort of difficulty. I am your mother, and Madame is to me but a mere stranger. However, as she is my daughter-in-law, do not doubt that I shall listen to all you have to tell me with interest, were it only on your account."

"Come now, in your turn, madam, acknowledge to me, that you have yourself remarked something."

"Something—Philippe! "why your words are terrifyingly vague. Something!—and of what nature is this something?"

"Madame, in short, is pretty."

"Why, yes."

"And yet she cannot be called a beauty."

"No; but as she is still growing, she may become much handsomer. You have already seen the change which only a few years have produced in her features—well, her beauty may still develop itself more and more; she is only sixteen years old. At fifteen, I also was very thin. But be that as it may, such as she is, Madame is pretty."

"And consequently she may be attractive."

"Undoubtedly, with such advantages any woman may be attractive, but more particularly a princess."

"She has been well brought up, has she not, madam."

"Her mother, Madame Henrietta, is a woman of rather cold and somewhat pretentious manners, but replete with honorable sentiments. The education of the young princess may have been somewhat neglected, but as to her principles, I believe them to be good; such at least was my opinion with regard to her when she resided in France; since she returned to England, I know not what may have passed."

"What can you mean?"

"Why, good heaven! I mean that there are certain heads, which being rather light, are easily turned by prosperity."

"Well, madam, you have pronounced the precise word; I believe in fact that the head of the princess is somewhat light."

"You must not exaggerate matters, Philippe; she is witty, and a certain dose of coquetry is very natural in a young woman; but, my dear son, in persons of high rank this defect is an advantage to a court. A princess who is somewhat of a coquette, generally draws round her a brilliant court; a smile from her excites men to become luxurious in their attire, their equipages, it excites their wit, their courage even; the nobility fight better for a prince whose wife is handsome."

"Much obliged, indeed, madam," said Philippe, pettishly; "in good truth, my mother, the picture you have drawn is very alarming."

"And how so?" asked the queen, with feigned ingenuousness.

"You know well, madam," replied Philippe, dolefully, "how much repugnance I felt at the idea of being married."

"Well! now you really alarm me. You have then some serious complaint to make against Madame?"

"Serious! I do not say that."

"Well then cast aside these care worn looks. Should you wear them when in your own establishment, beware, or you will be taken for an unhappy husband."

"The fact is, that I am not altogether contented husband, and I shall be glad to let it be perceived."

"Philippe! Philippe!"

"By my word, madam, I will tell you frankly, that I did not anticipate that I should lead the life I am constrained to."

"Explain yourself."

"My wife, in truth, is not my companion; in the morning she is occupied with visits, her correspondence, her toilette; in the evening balls and concerts fill up all her time."

"You are jealous, Philippe."

"Who I? God defend me from it! Let others, if they will, play the stupid part of the jealous husband, but I am annoyed."

"Philippe, all you have reproached your wife with, are but innocent matters, and so long as you shall have nothing more serious—"

"Listen to me; without being positively culpable, a woman may render one uneasy; there are certain intimacies, certain preferences, which young

women encourage, and which suffice to trouble the brains of the least jealous husbands."

"Ah! you have come to the point at last, and it has not been an easy task; intimacies, preferences—good! We have been beating about the bush for nearly an hour, and at last you have touched upon the real question."

"Well; it is so."

"This is more serious; has Madame then committed wrongs of this kind towards you?"

"Precisely."

"What! after only four day's marriage does your wife prefer another to you—has she already intimacies? Take care, Philippe, you must be exaggerating her faults; by wishing to prove too much, we prove nothing."

The prince alarmed at the serious tone of his mother, attempted to reply, but he could only stammer out a few unintelligible words.

"And now you are retracting," said Anne of Austria; "I like that better; it is an acknowledgment that you are in the wrong."

"No!" exclaimed Philippe, "no; I do not retract, and I will prove it to you. I said preferences, did I not? I said intimacies, did I not? Well then, listen."

Anne of Austria complacently prepared to listen, and with the pleasure of a gossip, which the best woman in the world, which the best mother, even were she a queen, always feels when being admitted into the secrets of little family quarrels.

"Now," rejoined Philippe, "explain one thing to me."

"And what is that?"

"Why is it that my wife has retained an English court?—tell me that."

And Philippe crossed his arms, looking intently at his mother, as if he was thoroughly convinced she could not say any thing in reply to so serious a charge.

"Why," observed Anne of Austria, "nothing can be more natural; it is because the English are her countrymen, because they have expended large sums of money in accompanying her to France, and that it would be indecorous, and even impolitic, abruptly to dismiss a number of noblemen who have shown so much devotedness and have not shrunk from any sacrifice."

"A magnificent sacrifice in good sooth, dear mother, to leave a foggy

disagreeable country to visit such a beautiful one as ours, and where a crown will procure more enjoyment than four times the amount if spent elsewhere! A wonderful devotedness truly, is it not, to take a journey of a hundred leagues for the purpose of accompanying the woman with whom we are in love?"

"In love, Philippe! You cannot have considered what you have been saying."

"I have, by heaven!"

"And who then is it who is in love with Madame?"

"The handsome Duke of Buckingham. Now do not, pray, defend him also, my dear mother."

Anne of Austria smiled and blushed at the same moment. The name of Buckingham summoned up such sweet and mournful recollections.

"The Duke of Buckingham!" she murmured.

"Yes, one of those chamber minions, as my grandfather Henry IV. used to say."

"The Buckinghams are brave and loyal," courageously said Anne of Austria.

"There now, my mother is espousing the cause of my wife's gallant, in opposition to me," cried Philippe, so much exasperated, that his weak nature vented itself in tears.

"My son! My son!" exclaimed Anne of Austria, "that expression is unworthy of you. Your wife has no gallant, and should she ever have one it would not be the Duke of Buckingham; all of that race are loyal and discreet; to them hospitality is sacred."

"Why, madam," rejoined Philippe, "the Duke of Buckingham is an Englishman, and do the English so religiously respect the property of French princes?"

For the second time Anne of Austria blushed deeply, and turned away under pretence of reaching her pen from the inkstand, but in reality, that she might conceal her blushes from her son.

"In good truth, Philippe," said she, "you are using words which altogether confound me; your anger blinds you, while it terrifies me; come now, be calm; reflect."

"Madam, there is no need for me to reflect, I see."

"And what is it you see?"

"I see that M. de Buckingham

never leaves my wife. He dares to make her presents and she dares to accept them. Yesterday she was speaking of perfume bags scented with essence of violets; now, you are well aware, madam, that our French perfumers have never been able to compound that odour, for you have frequently asked for it without being able to obtain it. Well then, the duke also wore one of these bags scented with violets, consequently the one my wife had came from him."

"Upon my word, sir," said Anne of Austria, "you are building pyramids upon the points of needles; have a care! I ask of you, what harm there possibly can be in a man giving a receipt for a new essence to his countrywoman? These strange ideas, I vow to you, painfully recall to mind the conduct of your father, who frequently made me suffer most unjustly."

"The Duke of Buckingham's father was doubtless more reserved, more respectful than the son," thoughtlessly observed Philippe, and without perceiving that he had rudely wounded his mother's feelings.

The queen turned pale and convulsively pressed her hand to her chest, but instantly recovering herself,

"At all events," she said, "you have come to me with some express intention."

"Undoubtedly."

"Then explain yourself."

"I came, madam, with the intention of energetically complaining, and to forewarn you that I will endure nothing from M. de Buckingham?"

"You will endure nothing?"

"No."

"What will you do?"

"I will complain to the king."

"And what would you that the king should reply to you?"

"Well then," said Monsieur, with an expression of ferocious firmness, which contrasted greatly with the habitual mildness of his features, "well then, I will do justice to myself."

"What do you mean by doing yourself justice?" inquired Anne of Austria, with a certain degree of terror.

"I insist that the Duke of Buckingham shall leave my wife; I insist that the Duke of Buckingham shall leave France, and I shall have my will signified to him."

"You will have nothing signified at all, Philippe," replied the queen, "for if you are bent on acting in this man-

ner, if you thus mean to violate the laws of hospitality, I will invoke against you all the severity of the king."

"You threaten me, my mother!" exclaimed Philippe, despairingly, "you threaten me when I am complaining to you?"

"No. I am not threatening you, I am only restraining your wild fury. I tell you that were you to adopt against the Duke of Buckingham or any other Englishman, so rigorous a measure, that should you even use means that would be deficient in civility, it would be dragging France and England into dissensions of a very painful nature. What! a prince, the brother of the King of France, cannot even conceal an affront, even were it real, in face of a political necessity."

Philippe made a gesture of dissent.

"Moreover," continued the queen, "the affront is neither real nor palpable, and has no other foundation than ridiculous jealousy."

"Madam, I know that which I know."

"And I, whatever you may know, I exhort you to patience."

"I am not patient, madam."

The queen rose and drew herself up with freezing ceremony.

"Then explain your will," said she.

"I have no will, madam, I express only my desire. If the Duke of Buckingham does not avoid my house, I will forbid his entering it."

"This is a question which we shall refer to the king," said Anne of Austria, with a swelling heart and agitated voice.

"But, madam," exclaimed Philippe, striking his hands against each other, "be my mother, and not the queen, for I am speaking to you as a son; between M. de Buckingham and myself, it would be merely a conversation of five minutes."

"It is precisely such a conversation that I interdict, sir," said the queen, resuming her authority, "it is unworthy of you."

"Well then, be it so, I will not appear, but I will intimate my will upon the subject to Madame."

"Oh! exclaimed Anne of Austria, with all the melancholy of bitter recollections, "never tyrannize over a wife, my son, never command yours either too loudly or too imperiously. A woman though subdued, is not always convinced."

"What is to be done, then? I will consult those around me."

"Yes, your hypocritical counsellors, your Chevalier de Lorraine, your De Wardes.—Leave the care of this affair to me, Philippe. You wish that the Duke of Buckingham should leave Paris, do you not?"

"And at the earliest moment, madam."

"Well then, send the duke to me, my son; smile upon him; do not speak of this to your wife, to the king, to any one. As to advice, receive it only from me. Alas! I know too well the miseries produced in a family by meddling counsellors."

"I will obey you, my mother."

"And you shall be satisfied, Philippe. Find the duke."

"Oh! that is by no means difficult."

"Where do you think he is?"

"Where, by heaven! but at Madame's door; he is there waiting her levée, there can be no doubt of that."

"Very well," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Be pleased to tell the duke that I beg of him to come to me."

Philippe kissed his mother's hand and went forth in search of the duke of Buckingham.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR EVER.

THE Duke of Buckingham, showing the greatest deference to the invitation of the queen-mother, presented himself in her apartments within half an hour from the time the Duke of Orleans had left her.

When his name was announced by the usher, the queen, who was seated at her table, with her face covered with both her hands, raised it, and with a smile received the graceful and respectful salutation which the duke addressed to her.

Anne of Austria was still handsome. It is well known that at even this advanced age, her long fair hair, her beautiful hands, her vermilion lips, excited the admiration of all who saw them.

Completely absorbed at that moment by a recollection which stirred every fibre of her heart, she was as lovely as in the days of her youth, when her palace gates were thrown open to receive the young and impassioned father of this Buckingham, the unhappy man

who had lived but for her, and who had died uttering her name.

"Your majesty," said Buckingham respectfully, "desired to speak with me!"

"Yes, duke," replied the queen in English, "be pleased to take a chair."

This favor which Anne of Austria granted to the young man, her addressing him so kindly in the language of the country from which he had been severed since his sojourn in France, profoundly moved the duke.

He immediately conceived that the queen had some request to make.

After having for a few moments indulged the insurmountable feelings which her recollections had given rise to, the queen recovered her self-possession, and with a smiling air, continued,

"Sir," said she, in French, "what do you think of France?"

"It is a beautiful country, madam," replied the duke.

"Had you before seen it?"

"Yes, madam, once before."

"But as is the case with every good Englishman, you prefer England?"

"I love my own country better than the country of a Frenchman," replied the duke, "but if your majesty asks me which I prefer to live in, London or Paris, I should answer Paris."

Anne of Austria remarked the warmth of tone in which these words had been pronounced.

"I have been told, my lord, that you have fine estates, that you inhabit an ancient and sumptuous palace?"

"My father's palace," replied Buckingham, casting down his eyes.

"Those are great advantages and valuable remembrances," observed the queen, blushing in spite of herself, "remembrances from which one would not willingly separate."

"In truth," replied the duke, subdued by the melancholy influence of this preamble, "people of feeling hearts live quite as much in the past or the future as in the present."

"That is true," said the queen in a low voice.

"The result of all this will be," continued she, "that you, my lord, who have a feeling heart—you will soon leave France—to return once more to your rich possessions, your loved relics."

Buckingham raised his head.

"I do not think so, madam."

"How?"

"I think on the contrary that I shall

leave England altogether, and fix my residence in France."

It was now the turn of Anne of Austria to express astonishment.

"How," said she, "you are no longer enjoying the favor of the new king?"

"On the contrary, madam, the king treats me with unbounded kindness."

"It cannot surely be that your fortune has been injured; I had heard it was very considerable."

"My fortune, madam, was never in a more flourishing state than at this moment."

"There must be then some secret cause for this determination?"

"No, madam," eagerly replied Buckingham, "there is nothing secret in the cause of my determination. I wish to reside in France; I like a court so replete with taste and politeness; in short, madam, I like those pleasures of rather a serious nature, which are not the pleasures of my own country, and which are to be found in France."

Anne of Austria smiled incredulously.

"Serious pleasures!" said she, "have you well reflected, my lord, on these serious matters?"

The duke hesitated.

"There can be no pleasure sufficiently serious," continued the queen, "to prevent a man of your high rank—"

"Madam," said the Duke of Buckingham, interrupting her, "it appears to me that your majesty is insisting strenuously on this point."

"You think so, duke?"

"This is—and I trust your majesty will excuse my making the observation—the second time that you have vaunted the attractions of England at the expense of the charm to be found in a residence in France."

Anne of Austria drew nearer to the young duke, and placing her lovely hand upon his shoulder, which thrilled at the contact—

"Believe me, sir," said she, "nothing can surpass a residence in our native country. It has happened to me, and that frequently, to regret Spain. I have lived long, my lord, very long for a woman, and I will acknowledge to you that not a year has past without my regretting Spain."

"Not a year, madam," coldly said the duke, "not one of those years when you were the queen of beauty, as, moreover, you still are."

"Oh! no flattery, duke; I am a

woman old enough to be your mother."

She uttered these words with such an accent, such a sweetness, that they penetrated the heart of Buckingham.

"Yes," she continued, "I might be your mother, and therefore it is that I offer you good advice."

"You advise me to return to London!" exclaimed the duke.

"Yes, my lord," she replied.

The duke clasped his hands with a terrified air, which could not fail to produce an effect upon a woman disposed to tender feelings from tender recollections.

"It must be so," added the queen.

"How!" exclaimed he again, "I am told seriously that I *must* leave Paris, that I must exile myself, that I must decamp?"

"That you should exile yourself! did you not say that? Ah! my lord, any one would imagine that France was your own country."

"Madam, the country of those who love is the country of the persons whom they love."

"Not a word more, my lord," cried the queen, "you forget to whom you are speaking."

Buckingham threw himself on both knees.

"Madam, madam, you are the fountain of wit, of goodness, of clemency; you are not only, madam, the first person of this kingdom from rank, you are the first in the whole world from qualities which render you divine; I have said nothing, madam—have I said any thing to which you could reply by so cruel a sentence? Have I betrayed myself, madam?"

"You have betrayed yourself," said the queen, in a low voice.

"I have said nothing! I know nothing."

"You forget that you have spoken, thought before a woman, and moreover—"

"Moreover," cried the duke, eagerly interrupting, "no one knows that you are listening to me."

"On the contrary, duke, it is known; you have the defects as well as the good qualities of youth."

"I have been betrayed! I have been denounced!"

"And by whom?"

"By those who at Havre even, with infernal perspicuity, read in my heart as it had been an open book."

"I know not of whom you mean to speak."

"Why, for instance, M. de Bragelonne."

"I have heard the name but know not the person who is the bearer of it. No, M. de Bragelonne has not said a word."

"Who, then can it be? Oh! madam, if any one has had the audacity to see in me, that which I would not allow even myself to see—"

"What would you then do, duke?"

"There are secrets which kill those who discover them."

"He who has discovered your secret, madman that you are, is not killed yet; and what is more, will not be killed by you; he is armed at all points, shielded by his rights; he is a husband, a jealous one, the second gentleman of France, my son, the Duke of Orleans."

The duke turned pale.

"How cruel you are, madam!" he exclaimed.

"Ah! you are a true Buckingham," said Anne of Austria, in a melancholy tone, "running into every extreme and combatting the clouds, when it would be so easy for you to remain at peace with all the world and yourself."

"If we make war, madam, we die upon the field of battle," calmly replied the young man, but allowing himself to be overcome by the most depressing sadness.

Anne of Austria ran to him and took his hand.

"Villiers," said she to him, in English, but with an intensity of feeling no one could have resisted. "Villiers, what is it that you demand? Of a mother that she should sacrifice her son; of a queen that she should consent to the dishonor of her house! You are a child, you cannot think of it! What! to spare you a few tears you would have me commit these two crimes, Villiers! You speak of the dead; the dead were, at least, respectful and submissive; the dead bowed down before an order for their exile; they carried with them their despair as the treasure of their heart, because that despair was inflicted by the woman whom they loved, because even death thus conferred would have been considered as a gift, a favor."

Buckingham rose up, with agitated features, his hands convulsively pressed upon his heart.

"You are right, madam," said he,

"but those of whom you speak had received the order for their exile from beloved lips; they were not driven away; they were not entreated to go; there was no one to mock at them."

"No, but they were remembered!" murmured Anne of Austria. "But who tells you that you are driven away, that you are exiled? who tells you that you that your devotedness will not be remembered? I speak of no one, Villiers, I speak but for myself, go! Render me this service, do me this favor; let me owe still this much more to some one of your name."

"It is then for you, madam?"

"For me alone."

"There will not be a man who will laugh at my departure, any prince who will say, 'It was my will.'"

"Duke, listen to me."

And here the august countenance of the aged queen assumed a solemn expression: "I swear to you that no one commands in this matter if it be not myself: I swear to you that not only shall no one laugh, not boast, but that no one shall be wanting in that respect which your high rank demands. Count upon me, duke, as I have counted upon you."

"You do not explain yourself, madam; my heart is lacerated, I am in despair, and the consolation, however sweet and complete on your part, will not appear sufficient to me."

"My friend," said the queen, with a caressing smile, "do you remember your mother?"

"Oh! but slightly, madam, for she died young, but I well remember that she would cover me with kisses when I smiled and with tears when I wept."

"Villiers!" murmured the queen, placing her arm round the young man's neck, "I am a mother to you, and believe me when I say that no one shall cause my son to weep."

"Thanks, madam, thanks," said the young man, much affected, and almost suffocated by his emotion, "I feel that there is still room in my heart for a more noble, a sweeter feeling than even love."

The queen-mother looked at him and pressed his hand.

"Now go," said she.

"When am I to set forth? command me as you will."

"Take all necessary time, my lord, let not your departure appear too hurried," replied the queen, "go, but choose your own day. Therefore, in-

stead of setting out to-morrow as you would probably desire, do not go till the day after, in the evening; only announce your determination this very day."

"My determination!" murmured Buckingham.

"Yes, duke."

"And—am I never to return to France?"

Anne of Austria reflected for a moment, and appeared absorbed by the melancholy seriousness of this meditation.

"It would be a soothing satisfaction to me," said she, "would you promise to return on the day when I shall be carried, to sleep eternally by the side of my husband, in the cathedral of Saint Denis."

"Who caused you so much suffering?" said Buckingham.

"Who was king of France?" replied the queen.

"Madam, you are full of goodness, you are surrounded by prosperity, your life is one continued scene of happiness; long, long years are still promised to you."

"Well then, your return will be so much the more delayed," replied the queen, endeavoring to smile.

"I shall never return," observed Buckingham, sorrowfully, "although I am still so young."

"Oh! thank heaven, you—"

"Death, madam, does not count by years; he is impartial; people die, though young, others live, though old."

"No gloomy ideas, duke; I will enliven you; return in two years from this time! I see by your handsome face that the ideas which now render you so sorrowful, will, before six months have elapsed, be altogether wasted and effaced;—therefore in two years, the time which I assign to you they will be completely dead."

"I believe that you judged me more rightly, madam," replied the young man, "when you said but now, that on us of the house of Buckingham, time had no hold."

"Silence! oh! silence!" exclaimed the queen imprinting a kiss on the duke's forehead, and with a tenderness she could not restrain, "go! go! do not afflict me further, do not again forget yourself; I am the queen! you are the subject of the king of England; King Charles is expecting you; adieu! adieu!—Villiers, farewell!"

"For ever!" replied the young man;

rushing from her presence, and with difficulty restraining his tears.

Anne pressed her hands to her forehead, and then viewing herself in a looking glass,

"Whatever may be said," murmured the poor queen, "woman is always young; be her years what they may, there will be still some corner of the heart which is not more than twenty."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH HIS MAJESTY LOUIS XIV. DOES NOT CONSIDER MADemoiselle DE LA VALLIERE, EITHER RICH ENOUGH OR PRETTY ENOUGH FOR A NOBLEMAN OF THE RANK OF THE VISCOUNT DE BRAGELONNE.

RAOUL and the Count de la Fère arrived at Paris in the evening of the day on which Buckingham had had the interview with the queen-mother.

He had scarcely arrived, when he went with Raoul to the Louvre, and sent him to the king to ask an audience.

The king had spent a portion of the day with Madame and the ladies of the court in looking over some rich Lyons stuffs, of which he had made a present to his sister-in-law. There had afterwards been a court dinner, and then cards, and as was his usual habit, the king on leaving the card table at eight o'clock, had gone into his cabinet to attend to public business with M. Colbert and M. Fouquet.

Raoul was in the ante-chamber at the moment that the two ministers came out of it, and the king on perceiving him through the half-opened door,

"What does M. de Bragelonne wish?" cried he.

The young man approached.

"Sire," he replied, "an audience for the Count de la Fère, who has just arrived from Blois, with a great desire to speak to your majesty."

"I have an hour at liberty before the card party," said the king. "Is M. de la Fère ready?"

"He is below and at your majesty's orders."

"Let him come up."

Five minutes afterwards Athos entered the cabinet of Louis XIV.

He was welcomed with that gracious kindness which Louis with a tact superior to his years, reserved for the purpose of gaining over men who are not to be won by ordinary favors

"Count," said the king, "allow me to hope that you have come to ask for something."

"I will not conceal it from your majesty," replied the count, "I have, in fact, come as a solicitor."

"Well, let us hear," said the king in a joyous tone.

"It is not for myself, sire."

"So much the worse; but in short, I will do for your protégée that which you will not allow me to do for yourself."

"Your majesty overwhelms me with kindness—I have come to speak to the king on behalf of the Viscount de Bragelonne."

"It is the same, count, as if you were speaking for yourself."

"Not quite, sire—That which I desire to obtain from you, I could not ask for myself. The viscount thinks of getting married."

"He is still young; but no matter—he has much distinguished himself, and I will find him a wife—"

"He has already found one, sire; and all he seeks is the consent of your majesty."

"Ah! then the only thing in question is the signing of a marriage contract?"

Athos bowed.

"Has he selected a rich bride, and one whose rank is satisfactory to you?"

Athos hesitated for an instant.

"The bride is a young lady of quality, but she is not rich."

"That is an evil for which we can find a remedy."

"I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to your majesty, but you will allow me to make one observation?"

"Assuredly."

"Your majesty would intimate an intention of giving a dowry to this young lady?"

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"And my application to your majesty will have produced this result? I should be much grieved, sire."

"No false delicacy, count; what is the name of the betrothed?"

"It is," coldly replied Athos, "Mademoiselle de la Vallière de la Baume le Blanc."

"Ah!" cried the king, seeming to be summoning his recollections, "I knew that name; a Marquis de la Vallière."

"Yes, sire, it is his daughter."

"The marquis, I think, is dead?"

"Yes, sire."

"And the widow afterwards married M. de Saint Remy, the intendent of the dowager-duchess of Orleans."

"Your majesty is well informed."

"I now recollect it all—and, further, this young lady is now one of the ladies of honor to our young Madame."

"Your majesty knows the whole story better than myself."

The king again reflected, and stole a glance at the rather pensive features of Athos.

"Count," said he, "it appears to me that this young lady is not particularly beautiful."

"I cannot speak as to that," replied Athos.

"I have looked at her; but she did not strike me."

"She has a sweet and modest air, but not much beauty."

"Fine, fair hair, however."

"I believe she has."

"And tolerably fine blue eyes."

"Precisely."

"Therefore as far as beauty is concerned there is nothing very striking; but now let us turn to pecuniary matters."

"A dowry of some fifteen to twenty thousand livres at the most, sire; but lovers are disinterested, and I myself, do not consider money as an object."

"Oh! as to any thing superfluous, you mean to say; but it is urgent that there should be enough to provide for actual necessities, and without a certain dowry a woman cannot approach the court. But we will supply this deficiency. I will do that for Bragelonne's sake."

Athos bowed.

The king again remarked his coldness.

"Now then," said Louis XIV., "these pecuniary matters being settled let us speak of her rank. She is the daughter of a marquis, that is all very well; but we have that worthy Saint Remy who rather dims the escutcheon, but that is only on the female side, I know; yet he does, in short obscure it; and you, count, I believe, are tenacious as to the dignity of your house."

"I sire,—I am not tenacious with regard to any thing excepting my devotedness to your majesty."

The king again paused.

"Really," said he, "you much surprise me, sir, even from the very commencement of this conversation. You come

here to request my assent to a marriage, and you appear to be much afflicted while making this request. Oh! I am but rarely mistaken although so young, for with some persons my friendship for them aids my intelligence, with others, my mistrust doubles my perception. I say again that you do not ask this heartily, and with free will."

"Well, sire, I acknowledge that to be the case."

"Then I do not understand you. Why not refuse at once?"

"No, sire, Raoul possesses my most tender affection; he is enamored of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and he creates a paradise for the future. I am not one of those who would destroy all the illusions of youth. This marriage displeases me, but I entreat your majesty to consent to it, and that at the earliest moment, and thus confer happiness on Raoul."

"Stay, stay, count; first tell me, does she love him?"

"If your majesty insists upon my speaking frankly, I have no great faith in the love of Mademoiselle de la Vallière; she is young, a mere child, she is dazzled at the pleasure of seeing the court, the honor of being in the service of Madame: all this will outweigh in her mind every tender feeling she may have entertained; it would therefore be one of those matrimonial alliances of which your majesty has so many specimens in your court; but Bragelonne desires it, and therefore be it so."

"You do not, however, appear to me to be one of those easy fathers, who allow themselves to become the slaves of their children."

"Sire, I can be determined enough against the evil intencioned, but not against the affectionate and true hearted. Raoul is suffering; he has become sorrowful; his spirits, naturally so free and buoyant, have become heavy and gloomy. I would not that your majesty should be deprived of the services he might render you."

"I understand you," said the king, "and above all, I understand your feelings."

"Then," replied the count, "I need not tell your majesty that my only aim is to insure the happiness of these children, or rather of that child."

"And I," rejoined the king, "wish to insure, as you do, the happiness of M. de Bragelonne."

"Then I only wait your majesty's signature. Raoul will have the honor

to present himself before you, and will receive your assent."

"You are mistaken, count," said the king firmly, "I have just told you that I desired to promote the happiness of the viscount, and therefore is it, that for the moment I oppose this marriage."

"But, sire, your majesty has already promised—"

"By no means, count. I did not promise that, for it is in opposition with my views."

"I fully comprehend all the generosity and kindness of your majesty in thus taking the initiative in this matter; but I take the liberty to remind you that I engaged to come here as an ambassador."

"An ambassador often demands things which he does not always obtain."

"Oh! sire, what a sad blow for Bragelonne."

"I will strike the blow myself, I will speak to the viscount."

"Love, sire, is an irresistible power."

"Love can be resisted, and I can assure you of that, count."

"When a man has the soul of a king, your soul, sire."

"Do not give yourself any farther anxiety on this subject; I have a project for Bragelonne; I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I do not wish him to marry so young. I will not have him marry her until she has made her fortune, and that he on his side, shall still further deserve my favors, such as those I intend to bestow upon him. In a word, count, it is my will that they should wait."

"Sire, allow me once more—"

"You said, I believe, count, that you had come here to ask a favor of me?"

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"Well then, in your turn grant me one. Do not let us say any more upon this subject: It is very possible that ere long we shall go to war, and it will be necessary that I should have noblemen around me unshackled by any tie. I should hesitate to expose the life of a married man, the father of a family, by sending him to face the guns of the enemy. I should hesitate also to give a marriage portion, without some very weighty reason, to a young lady as yet unknown. That would give rise to jealousy among my nobility."

Athos bowed, but made no reply.

"Is this all that you wish to ask of me?" added Louis XIV.

"Absolutely all, and I now will ask your majesty's permission to withdraw. But must I inform Raoul of what has passed?"

"Spare yourself that care, avoid that vexation, count," replied the king, "merely tell the viscount that I will speak to him to-morrow morning at my levée. As to this evening you must be of my card party."

"I am in my travelling dress, sire."

"The day will come, I hope, when you will not leave me. Before long, count, the monarchy will be so firmly established, that it will be able to afford a hospitality worthy of men of such merit as yourself."

"Sire," replied Athos, "provided that a king lives in the hearts of his subjects, the palace he inhabits is a matter of minor import, for he is then adored in a befitting temple."

After saying these words Athos left the king's cabinet, and rejoined Bragelonne who was waiting for him.

"Well, sir," eagerly said the young man.

"Raoul, the king is very kindly disposed towards us; perhaps not in the sense that you anticipate, but he is good and generous towards our house."

"Sir, you have some bad news to tell me," exclaimed Bragelonne, turning pale.

"The king will himself tell you to-morrow morning, that it is not bad news."

"But sir—in short, the king has not signed."

"The king intends to arrange your contract himself, and he intends to render it so magnificent, that he has not at present time to do it, therefore rather complain of your own impatience, than of the good-will of the king."

Raoul's consternation was complete, for he well knew the usual frankness of the count and his persuasive ability; these ambiguous words, therefore, plunged him into a gloomy stupor.

"Will you not accompany me home?" said Athos.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I will follow you," stammered Raoul, and he went down the stairs behind Athos.

"Oh!" cried the latter, suddenly, "As I am here, can I not see M. d'Arctagnan?"

"Would you wish me to take you to his apartment?" said Bragelonne.

"Yes," certainly.

"It is on the other staircase."

They therefore went in that direction; but on reaching the landing-place of the long gallery, Raoul perceived a footman wearing the livery of the Count de Guiche, who, on hearing his voice, immediately ran to him.

"What is it?" said Raoul.

"This letter, sir. The Count de Guiche has heard of your return, and has immediately written to you; I have been seeking for you for the last hour."

Raoul turned towards Athos, and before breaking the seal of the letter, said,

"Will you permit me, sir?"

"Oh! certainly."

"Dear Raoul," said the Count de Guiche, "I have to consider an affair of much importance, and hearing that you have arrived, wish to consult you. Come quickly."

Bragelonne had scarcely read this note, when a valet, wearing the livery of the Duke of Buckingham, came out of the gallery-door and recognizing Raoul, respectfully approached him.

"From my lord, the Duke of Buckingham," said he.

"Ah!" cried Athos, "I see, Raoul, that you have as much business as the general of an army. I will leave you, I will manage to find out M. d'Artagnan."

"I trust you will excuse me," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes, I will excuse you; good-bye, Raoul, you will find me at my hotel till to-morrow, at day-light the next morning, I may start for Blois, unless any thing should happen in the mean time."

"To-morrow, sir, I will pay my respects to you."

Athos left him.

Raoul opened the letter from Buckingham.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," said the Duke, "of all the Frenchmen I have met, you are the one who most pleases me; I am about to stand in need of your friendship. I have received a certain message, written in good French. I am an Englishman, and am apprehensive that I may not rightly understand it. The letter is signed with a good name, and that is all I know. Will you be so obliging as to favor me with a call, for I have been told that you have just returned from Blois?"

"Your devoted,

"VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM."

"I will be with your master in a few minutes," said Raoul, dismissing the Count de Guiche's servant.

"And in an hour I will be with the Duke of Buckingham," he added, making a sign to the duke's messenger.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HOST OF SWORD THRUSTS IN THE AIR.

RAOUL, on reaching Guiche's house, found him conversing with de Wardes and Manicamp.

De Wardes, since the adventure at the gate, treated Raoul as a perfect stranger.

Any one would have imagined that nothing had occurred between them; they had merely the air of not being acquainted with each other.

On the arrival of Raoul, Guiche at once went up to him.

Raoul, while pressing his friend's hand, cast a rapid glance on the two young men. He endeavored to divine by their countenances that which was passing in their minds.

De Wardes was cold and impenetrable.

Manicamp appeared lost in the contemplation of a new trimming, which seemed to absorb all his faculties.

Guiche took Raoul into an adjoining cabinet, and having made him sit down,

"How well you look!" said he.

"That is strange enough," replied Raoul, "for I am, by no means, cheerful."

"It is then with you as with me, Raoul, is it not? Love runs not smoothly."

"So much the better, as regards you, count; the worst news, and that which would most afflict me, would be to learn that yours went happily."

"Oh! then, there is no need for any affliction, for not only am I really unhappy, but I see people who are happy all around me."

"I really do not understand you," replied Raoul, "explain yourself, my friend, explain."

"You shall soon understand it all. I have vainly struggled against the feeling which you saw grow within me, increase within me, master my whole soul; I have invoked your sage advice, and all my own strength of mind; I have deeply reflected on the unhappy

course on which I am entering ; I have measured all its depths ; it leads, I know, to an abyss, but no matter, I must pursue the road I have chosen."

"Madman! you cannot take another step without to-day drawing down ruin on yourself, to-morrow, death!"

"Well, come what may!"

"Guiche!"

"I have reflected upon all—listen."

"Oh! you believe you will succeed, you believe that Madame will love you."

"Raoul, I believe nothing; I hope, because hope is innate in man, and it exists even to the grave."

"But even admitting that you obtain the happiness you hope for, you are more surely lost than did you not attain it."

"I entreat you do not again interrupt me, Raoul, you cannot convince me, for I tell you beforehand, that I do not wish to be convinced, I have proceeded so far that I cannot retreat; I have suffered so poignantly, that death itself would appear a blessing to me. I am not only in love to madness, Raoul, I am furiously jealous."

Raoul clasped his hands together with a feeling which much resembled anger.

"'Tis well!" he exclaimed.

"Well or ill, no matter. This is what I demand of you, of my friend, my brother. For the last three days, Madame has been in continued festivals, intoxicated with delights. On the first day I did not dare even to look upon her; I hated her because she was not so unhappy as myself. The next day, I could not keep my eyes from following her, for I thought that I perceived Raoul, that she, on her side, looked at me, if not with some degree of compassion, at all events with kindness. But between her looks and mine, a shadow constantly interposed; the smile of another provoked a smile from her. By the side of her horse, eternally gallops a horse which is not mine; in her ear vibrates incessantly a voice that is not mine. For the three last days, Raoul, my brain has been on fire; a burning flame courses through all my veins. That shadow, I must exorcise; that smile, I must extinguish; that voice, I must stifle."

"You would kill Monsieur?" exclaimed Raoul.

"Oh! no. I am not jealous of Monsieur; I am not jealous of the husband; I am jealous of the lover."

"Of the lover!"

"Why have you not remarked it here; you, who at Havre were so clear sighted?"

"You are jealous of the Duke of Buckingham?"

"To the death!"

"And what then?"

"Oh! in this regard, the matter is soon settled between him and me; I have taken the first step, I have sent him a note."

"It was you then who wrote to him. You?"

"How know you that?"

"I know it, because he has told me of it. See this."

And he handed to de Guiche the note he had received, almost at the same moment with his own.

De Guiche read it with much eagerness.

"It is the letter of a man of courage, and above all, of a gentleman," said he.

"Yes, undoubtedly, the duke is a perfect gentleman," observed Raoul, "it is not necessary that I should ask you, if that which you addressed to him was written in the same courteous terms."

"I will show you my letter, when you shall go to him in my behalf."

"But that is almost impossible."

"How?"

"That I should go to him."

"And why not?"

"The duke asks me for my advice, as you do."

"Oh! you will give me the preference, I imagine. Listen—this is what I propose you should say to his grace—It is perfectly simple. One of these days, to-day, to-morrow, the day after to-morrow, any day that may best suit him, I wish to meet him at Vincennes."

"Reflect."

"I thought I had already told you that I have reflected, and in every way."

"The duke is a foreigner; he has a mission which renders him inviolable. Vincennes is very near to the Bastille."

"The consequences regard me only."

"But the reason for such a meeting? What reason can I give to him?"

"He will not ask you for a reason, be assured. The duke must be as tired of me, as I am of him; the duke must hate me as much as I hate him. Therefore, I entreat you, go to the duke, and should it be necessary that I should entreat him to accept the proposal I have made, I will entreat him."

"That is unnecessary. The duke has told me that he wished to speak to

me. The duke is at the king's card party. Let us both go there. I will draw him aside, into the gallery. You will remain unperceived. Two words will suffice."

"Tis well. I will take de Wardes with me to keep me in countenance."

"Why not Manicamp? De Wardes would join us there, even were we to leave him here."

"Yes, that is true."

"He knows nothing of this matter?"

"Oh! absolutely nothing. You are then always cold towards each other."

"Has he not told you any thing?"

"Nothing."

"I do not like that man; and as I never liked him, from this antipathy results, that I am not colder towards him to-day than I was yesterday."

"Well then, let us go."

They all four left the house. De Guiche's carriage was waiting at the door, and took them to the Palais Royale.

On their way there, Raoul combined his plans. The sole depository of two secrets, he did not despair of bringing about an amicable arrangement between the two adversaries.

He knew the influence he possessed over Buckingham; he knew his ascendancy over de Guiche; matters did not appear to him to wear a very despairing aspect.

On arriving in the gallery, which was splendidly illuminated, and where the most beautiful women and the most illustrious persons of the court were revolving in their atmosphere of light, Raoul could not, for a moment, prevent himself from forgetting de Guiche and his concerns, to gaze upon Louise, who, amid her companions, like a fascinated dove, devoured the royal circle with her eyes, sparkling with diamonds and with gold.

The men were standing; the king, alone, was seated.

Raoul soon perceived Buckingham.

He was within ten paces of Madame, amid a group of French and English, who were admiring the noble graces of his person, and the incomparable magnificence of his attire.

Some of the old courtiers remembered having seen his father, but these recollections were not in any way prejudicial to the son.

Buckingham was conversing with Fouquet. Fouquet was talking to him in a half whisper of Belle-Isle.

"I cannot speak to him at this moment," observed Raoul.

"Wait and choose your opportunity, but settle every thing as soon as possible, for I am burning!" said de Guiche.

"See now, here is our savior," said Raoul, on perceiving d'Artagnan, who, attired in his new dress as captain of the Mousquetaires, had made his entrance into the gallery, as a conqueror.

He immediately went up to d'Artagnan.

"The Count de la Fère was seeking for you, chevalier, some time ago," said Raoul.

"Yes," replied d'Artagnan, "I have just left him."

"I thought I understood that you were to spend a part of the night together."

"We have made an appointment to meet again."

And while thus answering, d'Artagnan's gaze was wandering right and left, endeavoring to discover something or some one in the crowd.

Suddenly his eyes became fixed, like to the eagle when he discerns his prey.

Raoul followed the direction of d'Artagnan's eyes; he saw that de Guiche and d'Artagnan bowed to each other, but he could not distinguish to whom that curious and proud look was directed.

"Chevalier," said Raoul, "you are the only person here who can render me a great service."

"And what is that, my dear viscount?"

"The matter is to disturb the Duke of Buckingham, to whom I wish to say two words; and, as his Grace is conversing with M. Fouquet, you will readily understand that so humble a mortal as myself cannot venture to interrupt their conversation."

"Ha! ha! M. Fouquet is here, then?" inquired d'Artagnan.

"Do you not see him? He is there."

"Ah! yes, I see him now. And you believe that I have a greater right than you have to interfere between them."

"You are a man of more important rank."

"Ah! that is true; I am captain of the Mousquetaires; it is a rank that was so long promised to me, that I always forget my new dignity."

"You will do me that service, will you not?"

"M. Fouquet, the deuse!"

"Have you any prejudice with regard to him?"

"Oh! no; it would be rather he, who has a prejudice against me; but no matter, as one day or other it must happen."

"See now; I really believe that he is looking at you, or is it—"

"No, no, you are not mistaken; it is really to me he does that honor."

"Then this is a favorable moment."

"Do you think so?"

"Go to him, I beg of you."

"Well, I will go."

De Guiche had not lost sight of Raoul. Raoul made him a sign that he had managed it.

D'Artagnan went straight up to the group, and bowed civilly to M. Fouquet as to the rest.

"Good day, Monsieur d'Artagnan, we were speaking of Belle-Isle," said Fouquet, with that courtly knowledge of the world, and that look which requires the half of a life to acquire, and which some people, notwithstanding all their study, can never attain.

"Of Belle-Isle! ah! ah!" cried d'Artagnan. "The island belongs to you, I believe, M. Fouquet?"

"M. Fouquet has just told me that he has given it to the king. Your servant, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Buckingham.

"Have you seen Belle-Isle, chevalier?" asked Fouquet.

"I have been there only once," replied D'Artagnan.

"Did you remain there long?"

"Scarcely a day, my lord."

"And you saw there?"

"All that a man can see in one day."

"A day is a long time, with such eyes as you have, sir."

D'Artagnan bowed.

During this time Raoul had made a sign to Buckingham.

"My lord superintendent," said Buckingham, "I leave you the captain, who has a greater knowledge of bastions and counter-scarps than I have, as I must join a friend who has just beckoned to me. You will I trust excuse me."

And Buckingham withdrew from the group and advanced towards Raoul, but pausing for a moment near the card-table at which Madame was playing with the queen-mother, the young queen and the king.

"Come, Raoul," said de Guiche, "he is here—be firm, and act speedily."

And Buckingham, after having paid

some compliment to Madame, continued to advance towards Raoul.

Raoul went forward to meet him. Guiche remained in the same place.

He followed them with his eyes.

The manœuvre had been so combined that the two young men met in an open space between the persons who were playing and the gallery, in which were walking, pausing every now and then to converse, several grave personages.

But at the moment they were thus proceeding, they were interrupted by a person approaching them.

It was Monsieur who advanced towards the Duke of Buckingham.

The young prince's lips, which had been carefully lubricated with rose-colored pomatum, were distended by his most gracious smile.

"Why, good heaven!" cried the prince with affectionate politeness, "what is this I have just now heard, my dear duke?"

Buckingham turned round; he had not observed the Duke of Orleans when he advanced towards him, but had merely heard his voice. He shuddered in spite of himself, and turned slightly pale.

"Monseigneur," said he, "what has been said to your highness which appears to excite such great astonishment?"

"A thing which is most distressing to me—one that will be a cause of mourning to the whole court."

"Oh! your royal highness is really too kind, for I imagine you are speaking of my departure."

"Precisely."

"Alas! monseigneur, having been at Paris only five or six days, my leaving it can be a cause of mourning only to myself."

Guiche heard all this from the place where Raoul left him, and he also shuddered.

"His departure," thought he, "what then can have happened?"

Monsieur continued in the same gracious tone.

"I can readily conceive, my lord, that the King of England should have desired your return: it is well known that King Charles, who knows how to appreciate merit, cannot permit you to be long absent from him: but that we should lose you without regret cannot be comprehended. Receive, therefore, the expression of mine."

"Monseigneur," said the duke,

believe that if I quit the court of France—"

"It is because you have been summoned back again—oh! yes, that is readily understood: but, in fine, if you believe that my wishes would have any weight with the king, I will entreat his majesty King Charles II. to allow you to remain still some time with us."

"So much kindness completely overpowers me," replied Buckingham, "but I have received the most positive orders. My sojourn in France was limited to a certain day. I have prolonged it at the risk of displeasing my gracious sovereign. It is only this morning I remembered that I ought to have returned four days ago."

"Oh!" cried Monsieur

"Yes, but" added Buckingham, raising his voice so as to be heard by the princesses, "I am like the man in the eastern story, who went mad for several days in consequence of having had a splendid dream, and who one morning awoke perfectly recovered, that is to say reasonable. The court of France has an intoxicating influence very analogous to this dream, monseigneur, but at length we awaken from it, and we leave it. I could not therefore prolong my stay, as your highness has been kind enough to request."

"And when do you purpose leaving us?" inquired Monsieur, in a tone of kind solicitude.

"To-morrow, monseigneur—my carriages have been prepared for the last three days."

The Duke of Orleans nodded his head significantly, as much as to say,

"Since you are so determined, it would be useless to urge you further."

Buckingham directed his eyes towards the queens; they met the glance of Anne of Austria, who approved and thanked him by a gesture.

Buckingham returned the gesture, concealing with a smile the agony of his heart.

Monsieur withdrew in the same way that he came; and at the same time Guiche advanced from the opposite side.

Raoul feared that the impetuous young man was about to make his proposal personally and therefore threw himself in his way.

"No, no, Raoul, all is now useless," said Guiche holding out both hands to the duke and dragging him behind a column.

"Oh! duke, duke!" cried de Guiche,

"forgive me for having written to you, I was a madman; pray return my letter."

"That is true," replied the young duke with a melancholy smile, "you can no longer bear me ill will."

"Oh! duke! duke; forgive me—my friendship—my eternal friendship."

"You can no longer bear me any ill will, now that I am leaving her—now that I shall never see her more."

Raoul heard these words, and perceiving that his interference between these two young men, who had now only friendly words to address to each other, had become altogether unnecessary, he withdrew a few steps.

This movement brought him nearer to de Wardes.

De Wardes was speaking of the departure of the Duke of Buckingham; the person he was conversing with was the Chevalier de Lorraine.

"A wise retreat," said de Wardes.

"And why so?"

"Because it economizes a sword thrust to the dear duke."

And they both laughed.

Raoul indignantly turned round towards them; the blood had rushed to his temples, his lips were expressive of disdain, and he knit his brows.

The Chevalier de Lorraine turned upon his heel, de Wardes remained firm, awaiting the attack.

"Sir," said Raoul to de Wardes, "you will not then forego your habits of insulting the absent; yesterday it was M. d'Artagnan, to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham."

"Sir, sir," retorted de Wardes, "you well know that sometimes I can insult those who are present."

De Wardes and Raoul, as they spoke almost in a whisper, touched each other, their shoulders leaned against each other; an observer would have perceived that the one was giving loose to every feeling of hatred, and that the patience of the other was exhausted.

Suddenly they heard a voice replete with grace and politeness, which uttered behind them,

"I thought that I heard my name mentioned."

They both turned round; it was d'Artagnan, who with smiling lips and laughing eyes had placed his hand on de Wardes' shoulder.

Raoul retired a step to make room for the mousquetaire

De Wardes shuddered; turned pale, but did not stir.

D'Artagnan still smiling, took the place which Raoul had vacated.

"I thank you, my dear Raoul," said he, "M. de Wardes, I have a few words to say to you. Do not withdraw, Raoul, every body may hear what I have to say to M. de Wardes."

Then his smile was effaced and his look became cold and piercing as a steel blade.

"I am at your orders," said de Wardes.

"Sir," rejoined d'Artagnan, "for a long time past, I have been watching for an opportunity to converse with you, and it is only now that I have succeeded. As to the place, I will acknowledge that it is ill chosen; but if you will take the trouble to come as far as my apartment, which is on the staircase leading to the gallery, it will be more convenient."

"I will follow you, sir," said de Wardes.

"Are you alone here, sir?" inquired d'Artagnan.

"Oh! no. I have Messieurs Manicamp and de Guiche, two of my friends, with me."

"Tis well," said d'Artagnan, "but two persons are rather few: you can find some others, can you not?"

"Oh! certainly as many as I please."

"Friends?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good friends?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well then, get a good number of them, I beg of you; and you, Raoul come also. Bring de Guiche, bring the Duke of Buckingham, if you please."

"Oh! good heavens! sir, what a ceremony is all this," replied de Wardes, endeavoring to smile.

The captain made a slight sign with his hand as if to recommend him to be patient.

"I am always impassible."

"Well, then, I shall expect you, sir."

"I shall be with you."

"Adieu, for the present."

And he went off towards his apartment.

waiting there seated in the recess of a window.

"Well?" said he, inquiringly to d'Artagnan as he entered the room.

"M. de Wardes," replied the captain, "has been pleased to promise me the honor of a visit, accompanied by some of his own friends and ours."

Shortly afterwards de Wardes, together with Manicamp, made their appearance; de Guiche and Buckingham soon followed them, with some surprise, not knowing why their presence was required.

Raoul came also with three or four gentlemen; on entering the room his eyes wandered around it, until he perceived the count, when he went and placed himself beside him.

D'Artagnan received his visitors with the courtesy which was peculiar to him. His countenance was calm and smiling.

All the persons present were men of great distinction, holding important situations in the court.

Then after having apologized to each of them for the trouble he had occasioned them, he turned to de Wardes, who, notwithstanding his great command over himself, could not prevent his countenance from expressing some surprise combined with anxiety.

"Sir," said he, "now that we are without the precincts of the king's palace, now that we can speak aloud without infringing on decorum, I will inform you my reason for taking the liberty to ask you to visit me, and at the same time to request these gentlemen to accompany you.

"I have been informed by my friend the Count de la Fère, of the injurious reports you have been spreading with regard to me; you have said that you held me as your mortal enemy, seeing that I was the mortal enemy of your father."

"It is true that I have said so," replied de Wardes, whose pallid cheeks became tinged with a slight hue.

"And you have accused me of a crime, a fault, a cowardly action. I beg of you to particularize these complaints."

"Before witnesses, sir?"

"Yes, undoubtedly, before witnesses, and you will perceive that I have chosen such as are well versed in affairs of honor."

"You do not duly appreciate my delicacy, sir; that I accused you, sir, is true, but I kept secret the object of that

CHAPTER XV.

CONTINUATION OF THE HOST OF SWORD THRUSTS IN THE AIR.

D'ARTAGNAN's rooms were not unoccupied. The Count de la Fère was

accusation; I did not enter into any detail; I restricted myself to expressing my hatred, but it was before persons to whom it was almost a duty to apprise you of it. You have not given me due credit for my discretion although you were interested in my silence. In this I do not recognize your usual frankness, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan bit the corner of his mustachio.

"Sir," said he, "I have already had the honor of requesting that you would state the particulars of the complaints you have against me."

"Aloud!"

"Assuredly."

"I will speak then."

"Speak on, sir," said d'Artagnan, bowing, "we are all listening."

"Well, sir; this matter regards not any wrong done to myself, but a wrong committed against my father."

"You have already told us that."

"Yes, but there are certain things which we hesitate to touch upon."

"If such hesitation really exists, I beg that you will surmount it, sir."

"Even in the case of a disgraceful action?"

"In any case."

The witnesses of this scene began to look at one another with some degree of anxiety; however, they felt somewhat reassured on observing that d'Artagnan's countenance gave no sign of emotion.

De Wardes remained silent.

"Speak, sir," said the mousquetaire, "you must perceive that you are keeping us all waiting."

"Well then, listen; my father loved a lady, a noble lady; that woman loved my father."

D'Artagnan exchanged a look with Athos.

De Wardes continued.

"M. d'Artagnan intercepted letters appointing a rendezvous; took the place of the person who was really expected, and took advantage of the darkness."

"That is all true," said d'Artagnan.

A slight murmur was heard to proceed from the assembled company.

"Yes, I did commit this unworthy action; but you ought to have added, sir, since you are so impartial, that this same lady pretended to love me. That at the time the first letter fell accidentally into my hands, your father had never spoken to her, knew not of her affection, if such it may be called

for him, and you should have also said that at the period when this event occurred, and with which you now reproach me, I was not twenty-one years old."

"The action is not the less disgraceful," said de Wardes, "and the age of reason would suffice to prevent a gentleman from committing an indelicacy of such a nature."

Another murmur was then heard, but it was one of astonishment and almost of doubt.

"It was in fact a disgraceful trick," said d'Artagnan, "and I did not wait until M. de Wardes reproached me, to reproach myself, and that bitterly for having committed it. Age has rendered me more reasonable, and above all more conscientious. I have expiated this wrong by long enduring and most bitter regret; but I appeal to you, gentlemen. All this took place in the year 1626, and of those days, happily for you, you know nothing but by tradition; and in those days love was not scrupulous. We were then young soldiers, always engaged in combats, either beating others or being ourselves beaten; our swords for ever out of the scabbard, or at all events half drawn; death constantly before us; the wars rendered us callous, and the cardinal was ever at our heels; what we did we were obliged to do speedily. In short, I have repented, and what is still more M. de Wardes I still repent me of that act."

"Yes, sir, I readily can conceive that, for such an action would demand repentance; but you nevertheless caused the perdition of a woman. The one of whom you speak, overcome with shame, overwhelmed by this outrage, fled from France, and no one has since discovered what became of her."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Count de la Fère, extending his arms towards de Wardes, with a bitter smile, "oh! yes, sir, she has since been seen, and there are even here persons who, having heard her spoken of, may recognize her by the portrait I am about to draw. She was a woman twenty-five years old, thin, pale and fair, who had been married in England."

"Married!" cried de Wardes.

"Ah! you knew not then that she was a married woman? You see, that we are better informed than you are, Monsieur de Wardes. Do you not know that she was called *my lady*, without any name being added to that title?"

"Yes, sir, I know that."

"Gracious heaven!" murmured Buckingham.

"Well then, this woman, who came from England, returned to England after having three times plotted the death of M. d'Artagnan. That was mere justice, was it not? I will admit it, for M. d'Artagnan had insulted her. But that which was no longer justice, was, that when in England, this woman by her seductions won the heart of a young man who was in the service of Lord de Winter, and whose name was Felton. You turn pale, my lord of Buckingham; your eyes flash at once with anger and with grief. Then, finish this sad history, my lord, and tell M. de Wardes, who the woman was who placed the fatal dagger in the hand of the assassin of your father."

A cry escaped from every lip. The young duke pressed a handkerchief to his forehead, streaming with perspiration.

A deathlike silence pervaded the assembly during some minutes.

"You see, M. de Wardes," said d'Artagnan, whom this recital had the more affected, from the words of Athos having summoned up his own recollections of those sad events. "You see, that my crime did not occasion the loss of a soul, which soul was clearly and irreparably lost before the action which causes my regret. Therefore, this being duly established, all that remains for me now to do, M. de Wardes, is very humbly to ask your pardon for this disgraceful action, as I certainly should have asked your father's pardon, had he still lived, and had I met him after my return from England on the death of Charles I."

"But this is too much, M. d'Artagnan," eagerly cried several voices.

"No, gentlemen," said the captain, "and now Monsieur de Wardes. I hope that every thing is ended between us two, and that it will never again happen that you will speak ill of me. The affair is completely settled, is it not?"

De Wardes bowed and stammered.

"I hope also," continued d'Artagnan, approaching the young man, "that you will not again speak ill of any one, an unfortunate habit which you appear to have contracted; for a man so conscientious, so puritanical as you are, you who have reproached me, an old soldier, with a youthful folly, and after a lapse of five and thirty years,

you, I say, who raised the standard of purity of conscience, you, who by so doing enter into a tacit engagement never to do aught against conscience and honor, now listen attentively to what I am about to say, Monsieur de Wardes; beware that no history in which your name shall figure ever comes to my ears."

"Sir," said de Wardes, "it is useless to threaten me for nothing."

"Oh! I have not finished with you yet, Monsieur de Wardes," rejoined d'Artagnan, "and you are condemned still to listen to me."

All present drew closer around d'Artagnan with anxious curiosity.

"You were speaking very loudly just now of the honor of a woman and the honor of your father; you pleased us much when you were so speaking, for it is delightful to reflect that the feeling of delicacy and probity which did not, as it would seem, exist in our own soul, should exist in the souls of our children, and in short it is delightful to find that a young man of an age when young men generally are considered as rather the destroyers of the honor of women, it is delightful, I repeat, to find so young a man respecting and defending them."

De Wardes bit his lips and clenched his hands, evidently anxious to know how this sermon was to be concluded, the exordium to which had been so threatening.

"How does it happen then," continued d'Artagnan, "that you should have allowed yourself to say to M. de Bragelonne that he did not know his mother?"

Raoul's eyes shot fire.

"Oh!" cried he, rushing forward, "chevalier, chevalier, this is my own personal affair."

De Wardes smiled malignantly.

D'Artagnan put Raoul aside with his hand.

"Do not interrupt me, young man," said he.

And then eyeing de Wardes intently.

"I am now treating of a question that cannot be resolved by the sword," continued he. "I am discussing it before men of honor who have all, and more than once, stood sword in hand before their adversaries. I have selected them expressly on this occasion. Now these gentlemen know that every secret for which men fight ceases to be a secret. I therefore repeat my question

to M. de Wardes. For what reason was it that you insulted this young man by insulting at the same time both his father and his mother?"

"Why, sir, it appears to me," replied de Wardes, "that words are free when a man offers to maintain them by every means a gentleman has at his disposal."

"Ah! sir, pray tell me what are the means by aid of which a man of honor can maintain a malicious assertion?"

"By the sword."

"In saying this you fail not only in logic, but in religion and honor; you expose the lives of several men, without considering your own, which appears to me to be in great jeopardy. Now, as all fashions change, and as the fashion for duels has gone by, without at all referring to the edicts of the king, which absolutely forbid such meetings. —Therefore in order to be consistent with your ideas of chivalry, you will go up to M. Raoul and make him an apology; you will tell him that you regret having used an inconsiderate expression; that the nobility and purity of his race are engraved not only in his heart but in every action of his life. —You will do this, M. de Wardes, for I an old captain did so but now before your boyish mustachio."

"And should I not do so?" inquired de Wardes.

"Well then, if you do not, I will tell you what will happen—"

"That which you think you are preventing," observed de Wardes, laughing; "it will happen that your conciliatory logic will terminate in a direct violation of the king's decrees."

"By no means, sir," tranquilly replied d'Artagnan, "and you are altogether in error."

"What then would happen?"

"It will happen that I shall go to the king, with whom I am on tolerably good terms; the king, to whom I had the good fortune to render some little services, and at a time when you were not yet born: the king, in short, who at my request has just sent me an order in blank, addressed to M. de Baisemaux de Montlezun, governor of the Bastille, and I will say to the king, 'Sire, a man has basely insulted M. de Bragelonne, in the person of his mother, I have inserted the name of this man in the *lettre de cachet* which your majesty was pleased to give me;' so that M. de Wardes would be sent to the Bastille for three years."

And d'Artagnan drew from his pocket the order signed by the king, and showed it to de Wardes. Then seeing that the young man was not thoroughly convinced, and seemed to consider this warning as a vain threat, he shrugged his shoulders and went up to a table on which there was pen and ink.

De Wardes then perceived that the threat was one of the most serious possible nature. The Bastille in those days was something particularly terrifying.

He advanced a step towards Raoul, and in a voice that was scarcely audible,

"Sir," said he, "I offer to you the apologies which were just now dictated to me by M. d'Artagnan, and which I am constrained to offer to you."

"Stay, stay, one moment if you please," said the mousquetaire with perfect calmness; "You have made a slight mistake as to the terms. I did not say, '*and which I am constrained to offer you*;' what I said was, '*and which my conscience compels me to offer you*.' That expression, believe me, is a better one than yours; and so much the more valuable, as it will be the true expression of your sentiments."

"I consent to it then," said de Wardes. "But you will acknowledge, gentlemen, that a sword thrust through the body, as was the custom in former times, would be less painful than such tyranny."

"No, sir," replied Buckingham; "for a sword's thrust, if you receive one, does not decide whether you were in the right or wrong; it signifies, simply, that you are either more or less skilful."

"Sir," cried de Wardes.

"Ah! you are about to say something indiscreet," said d'Artagnan, interrupting him; "and I am rendering you a service by preventing you."

"Is this all?" demanded de Wardes.

"Absolutely all," replied d'Artagnan; "and these gentlemen and myself are satisfied with you."

"Believe me, sir," replied de Wardes, "your reconciliations are by no means fortunate."

"And for what reason, sir?"

"Because, I would wager that M. de Bragelonne and myself are now about to separate, greater enemies than ever."

"You are mistaken as regards myself, sir," retorted Raoul; "for I do not entertain the slightest atom of bitterness in my heart towards you."

This last blow completely crushed de Wardes; he cast his eyes around him as if bewildered.

D'Artagnan gracefully saluted the gentlemen who had been kind enough to be present at this explanation, each of whom on retiring cordially shook hands with him.

Not a hand was offered to de Wardes.

"Oh!" cried the young man, yielding to the anger which was raging in his heart, "shall I not find any one upon whom I can revenge myself?"

"Oh! yes, sir; for I am here," said a voice close to his ear, and pronouncing these words in a threatening tone.

De Wardes turned round and saw the Duke of Buckingham, who having remained, doubtless with this intention, had placed himself close to him.

"You, sir!" said de Wardes?

"Yes, I, sir. I am not the subject of the King of France; I shall not remain upon his territory, as I am about to leave for England. I also have accumulated my full portion of despair and rage, and, like you, feel great desire to avenge myself on some one. I much approve the opinions expressed by M. d'Artagnan, and I am in nowise bound to observe them towards you. I am an Englishman, and have come now to propose to you that which you have uselessly proposed to others.

"My Lord Duke!"

"Come now, my dear M. de Wardes," said the duke, "since you are so dreadfully irritated, take me for your tilting post. I shall be at Calais in thirty-four hours; you had better travel with me; the road will appear shorter to us, when together, than if we went separately. We will fight there—upon the sands which are covered at high water,—and which during twelve hours of the day are the territory of the King of France and during the other twelve the territory of God."

"Tis well," replied de Wardes, "I accept your proposal."

"By heaven!" exclaimed the duke, "should you kill me you will, I promise you, render me a most important service."

"I will do all I can to be agreeable to you," said de Wardes.

"Therefore, it is agreed. I take you with me."

"I shall hold myself at your orders."

"By Jupiter! this is precisely what I required, to calm my spirits; I stood in need of some great danger, some mortal peril."

"Well, then, I believe you have found precisely what will suit you."

"Your servant, M. de Wardes. Tomorrow morning, my *valet de chambre* will inform you the precise hour at which I shall set out. We will travel together as two good friends. I travel generally at great speed."

"Adieu!"

Buckingham bowed to de Wardes and repaired to the king's card room.

De Wardes, much exasperated, hurried from the Palais Royal, and took the road to his own house.

CHAPTER XVI.

BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN.

AFTER the rather severe lesson given to de Wardes, Athos and d'Artagnan descended the stairs leading into the courtyard of the Palais Royal.

"It is clear," said Athos to d'Artagnan, "Raoul will be compelled, sooner or later, to have this duel with de Wardes; Wardes is as brave as he is malignant."

"I know these fellows," replied d'Artagnan, "I had an affair with the father. I declare to you, and in those days I had good muscles and a ferocious assurance—I declare to you, I say, that I found the father a hard customer. You ought to have seen how I lunged at him. Ah! my friend, we have no such tilting matches now-a-days. I had then a hand which could not remain a moment quiet—a hand as lively as quicksilver—and that you know, Athos, for you have seen me at work. I was not merely flexible and still; I was a serpent, winding and twining about in every direction, seeking where to dart its head, that is to say, to fix its fangs. I stood at six feet from him, then at three, then again I would press him hand to hand, and a moment afterwards I was ten feet from him. No human strength was capable of resisting such a ferocious attack. And yet, de Wardes, with the courage of his race—the moral courage peculiar to himself—kept me at it during a long time, and I well remember that at the close of our combat, my fingers were sore tired."

"Therefore was I right in saying," rejoined Athos, "that the son will seek out Raoul, and in the end will meet with him; for Raoul is easily found when any one seeks for him."

"Agreed, my friend; but Raoul calculated well; he has no enmity against de Wardes; he said so himself; he will wait till he is challenged, and then his position will be a good one; the king could not then be angry. Moreover, we shall always find means to pacify the king. But why all this apprehension, this anxiety, for usually you do not alarm yourself."

"I will explain the cause of my uneasiness: Raoul is to see the king tomorrow, who will declare to him his will with regard to a certain marriage. Raoul will be much irritated, for he is in love, and if he should happen to meet de Wardes while his bad humor is upon him, the bomb-shell will burst."

"We will prevent its doing harm, my dear friend."

"Not I; for I am about to return to Blois. All this painted elegance of the court, all these intrigues, disgust me. I am no longer a young man to give into the miserable trifles of these days. I have read in the great book of nature too many great truths, to occupy myself with the miserable phrases that men whisper when they wish to deceive each other. In a word, whenever you are not with me I feel sick of Paris, and as I cannot always have you with me, I shall return to Blois."

"Oh! how wrong you are in this, Athos, and how you belie your origin, and the true destiny of your soul. Men of your stamp are created to retain to their last moment the full extent of their faculties. Remember my old sword, the Spanish blade I had at la Rochelle; it served for thirty years, and was perfect to the last, when one winter's day it fell upon the marble pavement of the Louvre and broke short off, my dear friend. I had a hunting-knife made of it, and it will last a hundred years. You, Athos, with your loyalty, your frankness, your cool courage, and your solid education, you are the man most wanted to convert and direct kings. Remain here: M. Fouquet will not last as long as my Spanish blade."

"Well! well!" said Athos, smiling, "here is my d'Artagnan, who after having raised me to the clouds, made a sort of god of me, carried me high up as Olympus, then throws me down flat to the earth again. What! be a minister, a slave? pshaw! am I not greater than all that? for I am

nothing. I remember having heard you call me the great Athos! Now were I a minister, I would defy you to confirm that epithet. Oh! no, I will not yield to any such a fate."

"Well, then, let us speak no more of it. Abdicate all, even your paternity."

"Oh! my dear friend, what you are saying is almost harsh."

D'Artagnan warmly grasped the hand of Athos.

"No, no, abdicate without fear; Raoul can rub on without you; I am at Paris."

"Well, I shall return to Blois. This evening you will bid me farewell. Tomorrow at daybreak I shall be on horseback."

"You cannot return alone to your hotel. Why did you not bring Grimaud with you?"

"My poor friend Grimaud is asleep; he goes to bed early. My poor old man is soon fatigued. He came with me from Blois, and I insisted on his remaining quietly at home, for were he to set out again without taking a good rest, and ride the forty leagues which separate us from Blois, it would kill him; I know he would die without complaining. But I am attached to my Grimaud."

"You shall have one of the mousquetaires to carry a torch for you. Hilloa! there, some one," cried d'Artagnan, leaning over the gilded balusters.

Seven or eight mousquetaires popped out their heads.

"A volunteer to escort the Count de la Fère," said d'Artagnan.

"I'll go! I'll go!" they all cried simultaneously.

"Thanks, for your eager kindness, gentlemen," said Athos, "but I could not think of inconveniencing you so much."

"I should be very happy to escort him," said a person, "had I not to speak with M. d'Artagnan."

"Who is that?" said D'Artagnan, endeavoring to see this person, who was shadowed by the staircase.

"It is I, dear M. d'Artagnan."

"God pardon me! that is surely Baisemeaux's voice."

"Himself, sir."

"Why, my dear Baisemeaux, what are you doing there in the courtyard?"

"I am waiting your orders, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Ah! unlucky wight that I am," thought d'Artagnan, and then continued aloud, "That is true, you were informed there was to be an arrest, but why did you come yourself, instead of sending a messenger?"

"I came because I had something to say to you."

"And why did you not let me know that you were here?"

"I thought I would wait for you," timidly said M. Baisemeaux.

"I will leave you; adieu d'Artagnan," said Athos to his friend.

"Not before I have presented to you M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, the governor of the Bastille."

Baisemeaux bowed and Athos returned his salutation.

"But you must know each other," added d'Artagnan.

"I have a vague remembrance of this gentleman," said Athos.

"You must recollect my dear friend Baisemeaux, one of the king's guardsmen, with whom we had such pleasant parties during the time of the cardinal."

"Ah! I remember now," replied Athos, and he courteously took leave.

"It is the Count de la Fère," whispered d'Artagnan to Baisemeaux, "who used to be called Athos."

"Yes, yes, a brave gentleman, one of the famous four," said Baisemeaux.

"Precisely. But come now, my dear Baisemeaux, shall we talk?"

"If you please."

"First, as to the order, that is all over; there is no order. The king has renounced the idea of arresting the person in question."

"Ah! so much the worse," said Baisemeaux with a sigh.

"How! so much the worse?" inquired d'Artagnan, laughing.

"Undoubtedly," replied the governor of the Bastille, "my prisoners are my revenue."

"Ah! that is true. I did not consider the matter in that light."

"There are no orders, then?" and Baisemeaux sighed again. "It is you," he added, "who have a magnificent position, captain of the mousquetaires?"

"It is tolerably good I admit; but I do not see there is any thing in it that you should envy. You are the governor of the Bastille, the first castle in France."

"I know that full well," said Baisemeaux sorrowfully.

"You say that very dolefully. I will change my emoluments against yours, if you will."

"Do not let us talk of emoluments," said Baisemeaux, "unless you wish to pierce me to the soul."

"Why, you are looking about you right and left as if you were afraid of being arrested, you who take charge of those who are arrested."

"It is for the purpose of discovering if there is any one near who could see us, or hear what we are saying. I think we should be safer if we could withdraw on one side to talk, if you will grant me that favor."

"Baisemeaux! Baisemeaux! surely you forget that we have been acquainted five and thirty years. Do not therefore put on these ceremonious airs. I do not devour governors of the Bastille uncooked. Be perfectly at your ease."

"I would you did!"

"Come now, let us go into the court-yard. I will take your arm. It is a beautiful moonlight night, and in the walks under the trees, you can relate to me your lugubrious history. Come."

He drew the groaning governor into the court-yard, took his arm as he had said he would, and with his abrupt kindness, said,

"Come now, unsheathe at once, make a clean breast of it—what is it you wish to say to me?"

"It will be a long story."

"You would rather go on groaning and lamenting. In my opinion that would be still longer. I would wager that you make fifty thousand livres a year out of your pigeons in the Bastille."

"And even were that the case, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"You astound me, Baisemeaux, you put on the air of a discontented man. I will take you before a looking-glass; there you will see that you are fat, blooming and round as a cheese; that your eyes sparkle like live coals, and but for that villanous wrinkle which you are making in your forehead, you would not appear more than fifty, and you are sixty at least. Hey!"

"All that is true."

"Zounds! I know well enough that it is true—true as the fifty thousand livres income."

Little Baisemeaux stamped his feet.

"Gently! gently!" said d'Artagnan,

"I will soon reckon up the account for you. You were captain of M. Mazarin's guards, that was twelve thousand livres a year, and this you received twelve years; we'll call it one hundred and forty thousand livres."

"Twelve thousand livres! are you mad?" cried Baisemeaux. "The old skindint never gave me more than six thousand, and the current expenses of the place amounted to six thousand five hundred. M. Colbert, who was the cause of the other six thousand livres being docked off, deigned to grant me fifty pistoles as a gratification, so that without my little fief of Montlezun, which produces about twelve hundred livres a year, I should not have been able to make both ends meet."

"Well, we will condemn that item then, and we come to the fifty thousand livres at the Bastille. There I hope you are fed, lodged, and have a salary of six thousand livres."

"Agreed."

"One year with another you have fifty prisoners, who, on the average, bring you in each a thousand livres."

"I do not deny it."

"That is fifty thousand livres a year; you have held the place three years, so that you have now one hundred and fifty thousand livres."

"There is one little consideration which you have omitted, M. d'Artagnan."

"And what is that?"

"That as to yourself, you received your commission of captain of the mousquetaries from the king's own hands."

"I well know that."

"Whereas I received that of governor of the Bastille, from Messieurs Tremblay and Louvière."

"I did not think of that; and Tremblay was not the man to cede his place to you for nothing."

"Oh! nor Louvière neither. The result of all this was that I gave Tremblay, sixty-five thousand livres for his share."

"A very pretty sum!—and to Louvière?"

"As much."

"What, ready money?"

"By no means, that would have been impossible. The king, or rather M. Mazarin, would not allow these two good fellows, who both sprung from the barricades, to be dismissed without remuneration; he therefore allowed them to demand conditions of a monstrous nature."

"What conditions?"

"Tremble—three years income as a gratification."

"The devil! so that the whole of the

hundred and fifty thousand livres have passed into their hands."

"Precisely."

"And besides that?"

"A sum of one hundred and fifty thousand livres, or fifteen thousand pistoles, which you please in three payments."

"It is exorbitant!"

"But that is not yet all."

"You are jesting, surely."

"Should I fail in the performance of any one of these conditions, those gentlemen were to be reinstalled in their office, and this they made the king sign."

"Why 'tis enormous! absolutely incredible!"

"But such is the case."

"I pity you, my poor Baisemeaux; but then my dear friend, why the deuce did M. Mazarin grant you this pretended favor. It would have been much simpler to have refused it."

"Oh! yes, but he was constrained to do it by my protector."

"Your protector! and who is he?"

"Why, by Jove! one of your own friends, M. d'Herblay."

"M. d'Herblay! what, Aramis?"

"The very man; oh! he has been very kind to me."

"Kind! to allow you to pass under the harrow in this way?"

"Listen awhile. I wished to leave the service of the cardinal, M. d'Herblay spoke in my behalf to Louvière and to Tremblay; they would not consent; I much desired the place for I knew what it was worth; I opened my heart at once to M. d'Herblay as to my pecuniary distress? he offered to be responsible for every payment."

"What, Aramis! Oh! you quite astound me. Aramis became responsible for you?"

"Like a perfect gentleman, he obtained the signature; Tremblay and Louvière resigned; I have paid twenty-five thousand livres to each of those two gentlemen; on the 31st of May every year, M. d'Herblay has come himself to the Bastille to bring me five thousand pistoles to divide between my crocodiles."

"So that you owe one hundred and fifty thousand livres to Aramis."

"Oh! no, and that is the sole cause of my despair, I owe him but one hundred thousand."

"I do not precisely understand you."

"Why 'tis clear enough, he came to

me but two years. But to-day is the 31st of May, and he has not come. To-morrow is the day on which my last instalment is due, and if to-morrow I should not pay it, those gentlemen, according to the terms of the contract, may cancel their bargain, I shall be displaced, and shall have worked three years and paid two hundred and fifty thousand livres for nothing, my dear M. d'Artagnan, absolutely nothing!"

"This is a very serious affair," murmured d'Artagnan.

"Can you now wonder that I should have a wrinkle on my forehead!"

"Oh! no."

"Can you conceive that despite the roundness of a cheese, the brilliant color of a lady-apple, despite these eyes brilliant as living coals, that I have now reached a moment when I have reason to fear that I shall neither have a cheese nor an apple to eat, and eyes whose only use will be to weep?"

"Tis most afflicting."

"I have therefore come to you, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for you alone can deliver me from this straight."

"And by what means?"

"You know the Abbé d'Herblay?"

"Assuredly."

"You know him to be mysterious?"

"Oh! yes."

"You can give me the address of his presbytery, for I have sought for him at Noisy-le-sec, and he is no longer there."

"And no wonder! he is bishop of Vannes."

"What! Vannes in Brittany?"

"Yes."

The little man began to tear his hair.

"Alas!" cried he, "how can I get to Vannes and back again by twelve o'clock to-morrow. I am a lost man."

"Your despair afflicts me."

"Vannes! Vannes!" exclaimed Baisemeaux.

"Hear me! a bishop does not always reside in his diocese; Monseigneur d'Herblay is perhaps not so far from you as you apprehend."

"Oh! tell me his address."

"I do not know it, my friend."

"I am inevitably lost! I will go and throw myself at the king's feet."

"But Baisemeaux, you really astonish me, how was it that as the Bastille could give a profit of fifty thousand livres, you did not apply th

screw and make it produce a hundred thousand?"

"Because I am an honest man my dear Monsieur, and my prisoners are fed like so many princes."

"Gadzooks! and you are much the better for it; give yourself a hearty in digestion with your excellent provisions, and manage to burst between this time and to-morrow noon."

"Cruel man! he has the heart to laugh."

"No; for you really afflict me. Tell me, Baisemeaux, can I rely on your word of honor?"

"Oh! captain!"

"Well, then, give me your word of honor that you will never even whisper to any one what I am about to tell you."

"Never! never!"

"You wish to find out Aramis?"

"At any price."

"Well, then, go to M. Fouquet."

"What can this have to do—"

"Simpleton!—where is Vannes?"

"Why, in—"

"Vannes is in the diocese of Belle Isle, or Belleisle is in the diocese of Vannes. Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet, and M. Fouquet had M. d'Herblay nominated to that bishopric."

"You open my eyes, and you restore me to life."

"So much the better. Go therefore and say simply to M. Fouquet that you desire to speak with M. d'Herblay."

"That is true!" cried Baisemeaux, transported with delight.

"And," said D'Artagnan, looking austere at him, "and your word of honor?"

"Oh! sacred," replied the little man, preparing to run off.

"And where are you running now?"

"To M. Fouquet's house."

"That would be useless. M. Fouquet is of the king's card-party. Be at M. Fouquet's early to-morrow morning; 'tis all that you can do."

"I will go: thanks."

"Good success to you."

"Thanks."

"This is a most singular story," murmured d'Artagnan to himself, as he slowly ascended the staircase after leaving Baisemeaux. "What interest, in the devil's name, could Aramis have in thus obliging Baisemeaux!—Hey? but we shall find it out some day or other."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE KING'S CARD-PARTY.

Fouquet, as d'Artagnan had said, attended the king's card-party.

It appeared that Buckingham's projected departure had poured a balm into all those hearts which but the day before had been so sorely ulcerated.

Monsieur, sparkling with delight, made a thousand affectionate signs to his mother.

The Count de Guiche could not separate himself from Buckingham for a moment, and while playing conversed with him on the arrangements for his journey.

Buckingham, pensive and kind, as a man of courage, who has determined on a line of conduct, listened to the count, and from time to time cast on Madame a look of regret and passionate tenderness.

The princess, who appeared in an ecstasy of delight, divided her attention between the king, who was playing at cards with her, Monsieur, who rallied her gently on her considerable winnings, and de Guiche, who evinced extravagant joy.

As to Buckingham, she paid but slight attention to him; to her, the fugitive, the exile, was a mere recollection, not a man.

Inconstant hearts are thus constituted, entirely occupied with the present, they break off violently with all that would derange their petty calculations of egotistical enjoyment.

Madame would have been well satisfied with the sighs and smiles of Buckingham, while present, but of what avail are sighs and smiles when offered at a distance. The channel winds which waft afar large ships—whither do they sweep the sighs—who can tell?

The duke was not a man to allow such a change to pass unperceived; his heart was mortally grieved at it.

Of a disposition naturally proud, delicate, and susceptible of deep attachment, he cursed the hour when this fatal passion first took possession of his heart.

The looks which he cast upon Madame became colder and colder by degrees, as his reflections congealed each rising emotion. He could not yet despise her, but he had sufficient strength of mind to silence the tumultuous cries of his heart.

As this change by degrees became perceptible to Madame, she redoubled her efforts to recover that supremacy which was about to escape her; her wit which was at first timid and undecided burst forth in brilliant sallies; she felt it necessary that she should be remarked, at any cost, above every one, above even the king himself.

And she was so. The queens, despite their dignity, the king, despite respect and etiquette, were totally eclipsed.

The queens, who at first were prim and starch, became more tractable and laughed. As to Maria Henrietta the queen-dowager of England, she was dazzled by the splendor shed upon her race, thanks to the wit of the granddaughter of Henry IV.

The king so jealous as a young man, so jealous as a king of every species of superiority, could not avoid surrendering at discretion to this French petulance, the English humor of which still more enhanced its piquancy. He allowed himself to be captivated by this radiant beauty rendered more dazzling by so much wit.

Madame's eyes darted lightnings. Mirth escaped from her ruby colored lips, as did persuasion from the lips of Nestor, the old Grecian.

Around the queens and the king, the whole court subjected to these enchantments, perceived, for the first time, that they could laugh in the presence of the greatest king in the universe, as people worthy of being called the most polite and the most witty in the world.

Madame's success on that evening was sufficient to turn the head of any one not born in those elevated regions that surround a throne, these favored mortals being exempted from such dizziness, notwithstanding the great height.

From that moment Louis XIV. considered Madame as a personage.

Buckingham considered her as a coquette deserving the most cruel torments.

Guiche considered her as a divinity.

The courtiers as a star whose light would become the focus of all favor, and of all power.

And yet Louis XIV. only a few years before, had not deigned to offer his hand to the ill-favored girl to dance in a ballet with him.

And yet Guiche had looked upon this divinity as a mere woman.

And yet Buckingham had adored this coquette upon both knees.

And yet the courtiers had not dared to applaud the first appearance of this star, fearing to displease the king, whom this star had in former times displeased.

This is what happened on that memorable evening at the king's card-party.

The young queen, although a Spaniard, and the niece of Anne of Austria, loved the king and knew not how to dissemble.

Anne of Austria, a close observer, as all queens are, felt the increasing power of Madame, and immediately bowed to the queen.

This determined the young queen to break up the party and return to her own apartments.

The king paid scarcely any attention to this departure, notwithstanding the affected symptoms of indisposition by which it was accompanied.

Tenacious as to the laws of etiquette, which he was beginning to introduce into his household as the element of every intercourse, Louis XIV. showed no sign of emotion; he offered his hand to Madame without looking at Monsieur, his brother, and conducted the young princess to the door of her apartment.

It was observed that on the threshold of the door, his majesty, free from all restraint, or not having sufficient command over himself, heaved a most profound sigh.

The women, for they observe every thing, and Mademoiselle de Montalais particularly, did not fail to remark to each other,

"The king sighed—Madame sighed."

And it was true.

Madame had sighed noiselessly, but with an accompaniment far more dangerous to the repose of the king.

Madame had sighed, closing her dark lovely eyes, then she had opened them again, expressing the most indescribable sorrow, and raised them to the king's face, which at that moment was suffused with heightened color.

The result of this blushing, these sighs interchanged, and the whole conduct of the two royal persons, was, that Mademoiselle Montalais had committed an indiscretion, and that this indiscretion had certainly affected her companion: for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, doubtless perspicacious, turned pale when the king blushed, and her service obliging her to attend upon Madame, she entered the apartment immediately after the princess, without

remembering to take her gloves, as the ceremonial required.

It is true that the country girl might plead as an excuse the agitation caused by the presence of his majesty. And, indeed Mademoiselle de la Vallière, while occupied in closing the door, had, involuntarily fixed her eyes upon the king, who was retiring, his face still turned towards the princess.

The king returned to the card-room; he wished to speak to several persons, but it was evident that his mind was otherwise preoccupied.

He confused several of the play accounts, of which divers lords took advantage, who had acquired these habits from Cardinal Mazarin, who had a bad memory, but was a good arithmetician.

Thus Manicamp, an absent personage, if ever one existed—and let not the reader allow himself to be mistaken—Manicamp, the most honest man in all the world, gathered up in the most innocent and unintentional manner, some twenty thousand livres, which were strewn on the green cloth, the ownership of which did not appear legitimately to belong to any one.

Thus, de Wardes, whose head was somewhat confused by the occurrences of the evening, left sixty double louis, which he had gained of the Duke of Buckingham, and which the latter, incapable, like his father, of dirtying his finger with any coin, of whatsoever description, left to the candlestick, even should the candlestick prove a living one.

The king only recovered somewhat of his usual self-possession at the moment when M. Colbert, who had for some time been watching for an opportunity, approached him, and without doubt very respectfully, but with pertinacity, poured some words into the still confused ears of his majesty.

On receiving this advice, Louis appeared to give it serious attention, and immediately casting his eyes around him—

"Is not M. Fouquet still here?" said he.

"Oh! yes, yes, certainly, sire," replied the winning voice of Fouquet, who was conversing with the Duke of Buckingham.

And he drew nearer to the king.

The king advanced a step towards him, with a very pleasing and unconstrained air.

"Excuse me, M. Superintendent," said Louis, "if I disturb your conver-

sation; but I call for you, wherever you may be, when I stand in need of you."

"My services are always at the king's disposal," replied Fouquet.

"And above all your treasury," with a feigned smile, observed the king.

"My treasury more than all the rest," replied Fouquet.

"This is the point in question, sir: I am about to give a fête at Fontainebleau, and mean to keep open house during a fortnight; I shall require the sum of—"

And he gave a side glance at Colbert. Fouquet, without appearing at all embarrassed, waited the conclusion.

"A sum of —" said he.

"Four millions," added the king, replying to a malignant smile from Colbert.

"Four millions," said Fouquet, bowing very low.

But his nails were dug deep into his chest, and there left a crimson furrow, although the serenity of his countenance was not, for a moment, troubled.

"Yes, sir," said the king.

"And when, sire?"

"Why—take your own time—that is to say—but no—at the earliest possible moment."

"It will take some time—"

"Some time!" cried Colbert, triumphantly.

"Yes, time to count out the crown pieces," retorted the superintendent, with a majestic disdain. "You cannot count and weigh more than a million a day, sir."

"Four days, then," said Colbert.

"Oh!" replied Fouquet, addressing himself to the king, "my clerks perform prodigies of activity when they are working for his majesty. The sum shall be ready in three days."

Colbert on hearing this changed color.

Louis looked at him with astonishment.

Fouquet withdrew without exhibiting any sign of either triumph or discomfort, smiling on the numerous friends in whose looks he could read the sincere friendship they felt towards him, and an interest heightened even to compassion.

Fouquet was not to be judged by his smile; in reality Fouquet felt a death-like coldness at his heart. Some drops of blood stained the fine cambric which covered his chest. His coat concealed the blood, his smile, the rage which was devouring him.

By the way in which he got into his carriage, his servants guessed that he was in no joyful mood. The result of these imaginings was that his orders were executed with the same rapidity and precision as may be observed on board a ship of war, commanded during a storm by an irritated captain. The carriage did not roll on, it positively flew.

Fouquet had scarcely time to recover himself during this rapid course.

On reaching his house he went at once up stairs to the apartment occupied by Aramis. The latter was still up.

As to Porthos he had very comfortably supped on a stewed leg of mutton, two roasted pheasants, and a mountain of cray-fish, and then had himself anointed with perfumed oils after the fashion of the ancient gladiators; this being done, he had himself wrapped up in flannels, and put into a well warmed bed.

As we have already said, Aramis had not yet retired to rest. Sitting at his ease, in a velvet dressing-gown, he was writing letter after letter, and in that minute and close hand-writing, a page of which would fill a quarter of a printed volume. His door was precipitately opened. The superintendent appeared, pale, agitated, and full of care.

Aramis raised his head.

"Good evening, my dear host," said he.

And his scrutinizing look at once observed the sorrowful demeanor and agitation of Fouquet.

"High play at the palace," observed he by way of beginning the conversation.

Fouquet seated himself, and by a gesture dismissed the servant who had followed him into the room.

And when the lackey had withdrawn and closed the door,

"Very high," said he.

And Aramis who was closely observing him, saw him stretch himself with feverish impatience on the cushions of his arm-chair.

"As usual, you have lost?" said Aramis inquiringly, his pen still in his hand.

"More than usual," replied Fouquet.

"But it is well known you bear your losses well.

"Sometimes."

"Good! M. Fouquet is an ill-tempered gambler.

"There are games and games, M. d'Herblay."

"How much have you lost, my lord?" asked Aramis with a certain degree of uneasiness.

Fouquet thought for a moment in order to be able to command his voice, and then without any sort of emotion, replied,

"The evening has cost me four millions."

And a bitter laugh accompanied the last vibration of these words.

Aramis by no means expected to hear of such a sum; he let fall his pen.

"Four millions!" said he, "you have gambled away four millions! Impossible!"

"M. Colbert held my cards," replied the superintendent with the same bitter laugh.

"Ah! my lord, I now understand it all. So you have been called upon for a further supply of funds?"

"Yes, my friend."

"By the king?"

"From his own lips even. It would be impossible to knock a man on the head with a more gracious smile."

"The deuce!"

"What do you think of that?"

"What do I think? that they wish to ruin you, that's clear!"

"Then you are still of the same opinion?"

"Still. Moreover, there is nothing in this which ought to astonish you, for it is what we have foreseen."

"Be it so; but I did not expect this four millions."

"It is true that the sum is a heavy one. But four millions do not kill a man. And this may be truly said when this man is called M. Fouquet."

"If you only knew the bottom of my coffers, my dear d'Herblay, you would be less calm."

"And you have promised it?"

"What would you have had me do?"

"That is true."

"On the day on which I shall refuse, Colbert would find it, where, I know not; but he would find it, and then I should be lost."

"Incontestably. And in how many days have you promised these four millions?"

"In three days—the king appeared very urgent."

"In three days?"

"Oh! my friend, when I think that as I passed through the streets just now, people cried, 'There goes the rich

M. Fouquet!' really, my dear d'Herblay, it is enough to deprive one of reason."

"Oh! no, my lord, halt there! The thing is not worth the while," said Aramis phlegmatically, and throwing some sand over the paper on which he had been writing.

"Well then, a remedy. A remedy for this evil which is irremediable."

"There is but one—to pay."

"But I have scarcely the amount. All must be exhausted. Belle-Isle is paid for. The pension has been paid.—Money, at the present moment is very scarce—and admitting that we pay this demand how are we to pay the next? for believe me, this is by no means the end of it. When kings have once had the taste of money, they are like ugers who have had the taste of flesh, they become ravenous. It will one day become necessary that I should say, 'It is impossible, sire.' Well! when that day comes I shall be lost."

Aramis slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"A man, in your position, my lord," said he, "is lost only when he himself desires to be so."

"A man, let his position be what it may, cannot contend against a king."

"Pooh! In my youth I contended against the Cardinal de Richelieu, who was the king of France—and besides that, a cardinal."

"Have I armies, troops, treasures? Even Belle-Isle no longer belongs to me."

"Bah! necessity is the mother of invention; when you think that all is lost—"

"Well?"

"One discovers something altogether unexpected, which saves all."

"And who will discover this marvelous something?"

"You."

"Who, I? I give in my resignation as an inventor."

"Then, I will."

"Be it so; but then you must set to work without delay."

"Oh! we have time enough."

"You kill me, with your phlegmatic coolness, d'Herblay," cried he, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Do you not then, remember what I said to you one day?"

"What was it that you said to me?"

"Not to be uneasy, if you had courage. Have you courage?"

"I believe so."

"Then, do not allow yourself to be uneasy."

"Well that is understood. At the hour of need you will come to my assistance d'Herblay."

"It will be only returning that which I owe to you, my lord."

"It is the business of financial men, to meet the necessities of men like you, l'Herblay."

"If to oblige be the business of financial men, charity is the virtue of men attached to the church. Only, on this occasion, you must still excuse me, my lord. You are not yet low enough; at the last moment, we shall see."

"We shall soon see that, then."

"Be it so. But now allow me to say to you, that, personally, I much regret that you should at this moment be so short of money."

"And why so?"

"Because, I was about to ask you for some."

"For yourself?"

"For myself, or for mine, for mine or for ours."

"How much?"

"Oh! do not be alarmed, it is rather a round sum, but not exorbitant."

"Tell me the amount."

"Oh! fifty thousand livres."

"A mere trifle."

"Really!"

"Undoubtedly; a man has always fifty thousand livres. Ah! why is it that the rascal whom they call Colbert, is not as easily satisfied as you are; I should be less tormented than I am. And when do you want that sum?"

"To-morrow morning."

"'Tis well! and—"

"Ah! that is true. You want to know its destination."

"No, Chevalier, no: I do not ask for any explanation."

"Oh! yes, to-morrow is the first of June."

"Well?"

"The day on which one of our bonds falls due."

"We have bonds, then?"

"Undoubtedly; to-morrow we have to pay our last third."

"What third?"

"Of the one hundred and fifty thousand livres for Baisemeaux."

"Baisemeaux! who is that?"

"The governor of the Bastille."

"Ah! yes, that's true. You make me pay one hundred and fifty thousand livres for that man."

"That is not it."

"But for what reason?"

"It is on account of the place he bought, or rather that we bought of Louvière and Tremblay."

"I have but a vague recollection of it."

"I can conceive that, you have so many affairs. And yet I do not believe that you have any that can be more important than this."

"Well then, tell me what was our reason for purchasing this place."

"Why to be useful to him."

"Ah!"

"To him, in the first place."

"And after that."

"And afterwards to ourselves."

"To us! and how so? You are jesting, surely!"

"My lord! there are moments when a governor of the Bastille, is an excellent acquaintance."

"I have the happiness not to understand you, d'Herblay."

"My lord, we have our poets, our engineer, our architect, our musicians, printing presses, our painters, we also require our governor of the Bastille."

"Ah! you believe—?"

"My lord, do not let us deceive ourselves; we run great risk of being sent to the Bastille—my dear Monsieur Fouquet," added the prelate, showing between his pale lips a set of teeth, the same handsome teeth which thirty years before, Marie Michon so much adored."

"And you are of opinion that one hundred and fifty thousand livres is not too large a sum for such an object d'Herblay? I can assure you that, in general, you lay out your money to more advantage."

"The day will come when you will acknowledge that you are in error."

"My dear d'Herblay, when a man goes into the Bastille, the past cannot protect him."

"Oh! yes it will, if the signed receipts are in good order; and besides, believe me, that our excellent Baisemeaux has not the heart of a mere courtier. I am positive, that he will be grateful to me for this money, without considering, as I have told you, my lord, that I take good care of his receipts."

"What a confounded affair. Usury even in an affair of mere benevolence."

"My lord, my lord, do not you meddle in all this; if there be usury, 'tis I alone am accountable, we shall both profit by it, and that is all."

"Some intrigue, d'Herblay."

"I do not deny it."

"And Baisemeaux is an accomplice."

"And why not? there are worse. Therefore I may calculate on having the five thousand pistoles to-morrow morning?"

"Would you wish to have them to-night?"

"That would be still better, for I must be off early to-morrow morning. Poor Baisemeaux, who knows not what has become of me, is upon live coals."

"You shall have the money in an hour. Ah! d'Herblay, the interest of your hundred and fifty thousand francs, will never pay the four millions," said Fouquet, rising.

"And why not, my lord?"

"Good night; I have business to transact with my clerks before I go to bed."

"Good night, my lord."

"D'Herblay, you are wishing me that which is impossible."

"I shall have my fifty thousand livres to-night?"

"Yes."

"Well then, you may sleep upon both ears, and it is I who tell you so! Good night, my lord."

Notwithstanding this assurance, and the positive tone in which it was given, Fouquet withdrew, shaking his head deliberately, and with a long drawn sigh.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SMALL ACCOUNTS OF M. BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN.

THE clock of St. Paul's was just striking seven when Aramis, on horseback, and attired as a citizen, that is to say in colored clothes, his only distinction being a hunting sword by his side, passed by the end of the Rue du Petit-Musc, and stopped opposite to the Rue de Tournelles, at the gate of the Bastille.

Two sentinels were on guard at this gate.

They made no difficulty in allowing Aramis to pass on, who entered the gate on horseback, and they pointed out his way through a long alley which had buildings on each side.

This passage led to the drawbridge, that is to say, to the real entrance to the castle.

The drawbridge was lowered; the morning service was commencing.

The sentinel at the exterior guard house stopped Aramis and asked him in rather an abrupt tone what was his business there.

Aramis explained with his habitual politeness that the business which brought him there was his desire to speak with M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun.

The first sentinel called to a second one, who was standing in an interior sentry-box.

The latter looked through his wicket and attentively examined the new-comer.

Aramis repeated to him the object of his visit.

The sentinel immediately called to a subaltern officer who was walking in a tolerably spacious court-yard, and who, on being informed of the nature of the request, ran in search of an officer on the governor's staff.

The latter, after having heard what Aramis had to say, requested him to wait a moment, walked from him a few paces, but returned to inquire his name.

"That I cannot tell you, sir," said Aramis, "but know that I have matters of such importance to communicate to the governor that I will answer for it M. de Baisemeaux will be delighted to see me. And more than that, when you shall have told him that I am the person he expects on the 1st of June I am convinced that he will himself hasten out to meet me."

The officer could not for a moment imagine that so important a personage as the governor of the Bastille would inconvenience himself for so unimportant a person as appeared to him this citizen on horseback.

"Well, really, sir," said he, "this falls out marvellously well. The governor is just going out, and you can see his carriage, with the horses already put to, in the court-yard yonder; it will not therefore be necessary he should come out to meet you, for he will see you as he passes by."

Aramis gave an assenting nod; he did not wish to give too high an idea of himself; he therefore waited patiently and silently, with his head bent down towards the pommel of his saddle.

Ten minutes had not elapsed when the carriage of the governor was seen to move. It drew up to the door. The governor came out, got into the carriage, which drove off slowly.

But the same ceremonies had to be

performed with regard to the master of the place as if he had been a suspected person; the sentinel advanced just as the carriage was about to pass the gate-way, and the governor opened the carriage door in order to be the first to show his attention to the regulations of the prison.

In this way the sentinel would convince himself that no one was leaving the Bastille surreptitiously.

The carriage then drove on under the arched gateway.

But at the moment when the grated gate was being thrown open, the officer approached the carriage, which had stopped a second time, and said a few words to the governor.

The latter immediately put his head out of the coach-window, and perceived Aramis on horseback at the farther end of the drawbridge.

He uttered a joyful cry, and instantly got out or rather darted out of his carriage, and ran to Aramis, whose hands he seized, making a thousand apologies. A little more and he would have kissed them.

"Ah! my good governor," cried Aramis, "how difficult it is to get into the Bastille! Is it the same with those who are sent here in spite of themselves as with those who come here voluntarily?"

"Pardon, pardon. Ah! monseigneur, what delight I feel in seeing your grace."

"Hush! What are you thinking of, my dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux? What would people think of seeing a bishop equipped as I am?"

"Ah! pardon me, excuse me, I had quite forgotten. Here," continued he, calling to one of his servants, "take this gentleman's horse to the stable."

"Oh! by no means," cried Aramis, "the deuse!"

"And why not?"

"Because there are five thousand pistoles in the valise."

The governor's face became so completely radiant that the prisoners, could they have seen him, would have believed that some prince of the blood royal had just been incarcerated.

"Yes, you are right," he replied. "Take the horse to the government house. Would you wish, my dear M. d'Herblay, that we should get into the carriage and drive there?"

"Get into the carriage merely to cross a court-yard, my good governor;

do you think I am so much an invalid? No, no, we will go on foot, good governor, on foot."

Baisemeaux then offered his arm as a support, but the prelate did not take advantage of it.

They thus arrived at the governor's house, Baisemeaux rubbing his hands with great glee, and giving continual side-glances at the horse, while Aramis kept gazing at the black and naked walls.

A spacious vestibule, and a steep white stone staircase led to Baisemeaux's apartments.

The latter crossed the ante-chamber and a dining-room, where a servant was preparing a table for breakfast, opened a small side door, and shut himself up with his guest in a large cabinet, the windows of which opened obliquely on the court yards and stables.

Baisemeaux installed the prelate with that obsequious politeness, of which a kind hearted and a grateful man alone knows the secret.

A large easy chair, a cushion for the feet, a small table on which to place his hand, were all comfortably arranged by the governor himself.

He had with his own hands, and with religious care, placed upon this table the bag of gold, which one of his soldiers had brought up stairs with not less respect than a priest carries the holy sacrament.

When the soldier had left the room, Baisemeaux carefully closed the door, drew back one of the window curtains and consulted the eyes of Aramis to ascertain if he required any thing further.

"Well! monseigneur," said he, without sitting down, "you continue then to be the most faithful of all observers of promises."

"In business, my dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux, punctuality is not a virtue but a mere duty."

"Yes, I can comprehend, in business; but it is not an affair of business that you have with me, monseigneur, it is a service you are rendering me."

"Come now, dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux, acknowledge, that notwithstanding this punctuality you have been somewhat anxious."

"As to your health, yes, assuredly," stammered Baisemeaux.

"I wished to be with you yesterday, but I could not, I was so much fatigued," continued Aramis.

Baisemeaux hurried to place another cushion behind his guest's back.

"But," rejoined Aramis, "I promised myself I would be with you very early this morning."

"You are always too good, monseigneur."

"And it appears to me it is well I was so early."

"How so?"

"Why, you were going out."

Baisemeaux colored.

"In fact," said he, "I was going out."

"Then I am inconveniencing you."

Baisemeaux's embarrassment was but too visible.

"Then, I am in your way," continued he, fixing his penetrating glance on the poor governor. "Had I known that I would not have come."

"Oh! monseigneur, how could you even for a moment imagine that you could inconvenience me. Oh! no, never."

"Acknowledge now, that you were going out in quest of money."

"No," stammered Baisemeaux, "no, —I swear to you: I was going—"

"Does the governor still intend going to M. Fouquet's?" cried the major from the court yard.

Baisemeaux ran distractedly to the window. "No, no," cried he, despairingly; "who the devil has spoken of M. Fouquet? are they drunk down there? why do you disturb me when I am busy?"

"You were going to M. Fouquet's," said Aramis, pinching his lips; "was it to the Abbé or the Superintendent?"

Baisemeaux felt much disposed to lie, but had not the courage.

"I was going to the Superintendent," said he.

"Then you see I was right; you you were going out for money, since you were going to him who gives it."

"No, really, my lord."

"Come now, you were doubtful of me."

"My dear lord, my only doubt arose from being ignorant of your place of residence."

"Oh! you would have obtained money from M. Fouquet, dear M. Baisemeaux; he is a man whose hand is always open."

"I protest I never should have dared to ask money of M. Fouquet: I wished to ask him to give me your address, that is all."

"My address of M. Fouquet," said

Aramis, opening his eyes widely in spite of himself.

"Why, yes," replied Baisemeaux, somewhat disturbed by the prelate's searching look; "yes, undoubtedly, of M. Fouquet."

"There is no harm in that, dear Monsieur Baisemeaux; only I cannot imagine why you should have thought of going to M. Fouquet to ask for my address."

"That I might write to you."

"I understand," said Aramis, smiling; nor was it that precisely I meant to say: I merely ask why you should go particularly to M. Fouquet to ask for it?"

"Ah!" replied Baisemeaux, "because M. Fouquet having Belle-Isle—"

"And what then?"

"Belle-Isle being in the diocese of Vannes, and you being Bishop of Vannes—"

"My dear Monsieur Baisemeaux, since you knew that I was Bishop of Vannes, there was no need for asking my address of M. Fouquet."

"Tell me, monseigneur," said Baisemeaux, completely put out of countenance, "have I been guilty of an indiscretion? If it be so, I sincerely ask your pardon."

"Oh! not at all," replied Aramis, tranquilly; "in what way could you have been guilty of an indiscretion?"

And while composing his own countenance, and smiling at the governor, Aramis asked himself how it was that Baisemeaux, who did not know his address, should know that Vannes was his residence.

"I will find that out," said he to himself, and then continued aloud—

"Come now, my dear governor, do you not think that we should regulate our small accounts?"

"I am at your orders, my lord, but before we begin will your lordship tell me—"

"What?"

"Whether your lordship will not, as usual, do me the honor of breakfasting with me?"

Oh! yes; and very willingly."

"Ah! that is as it should be."

Baisemeaux struck three times on a bell.

"And what does that mean?" inquired Aramis.

"It means that I have some one to breakfast with me, and that they are to prepare accordingly."

"Ah! the deuse; and you strike

three times. Do you know my dear governor, that it seems to me you are treating me with great ceremony."

"Oh! by no means, and moreover it is but natural that I should give you the best I have."

"And for what reason?"

"Because there is not a prince in existence who has done for me that which you have done."

"Why this is worse and worse."

"No, no—"

"Let us speak of something else; or rather, tell me, whether you are making money here."

"Why—yes."

"You have plenty of prisoners, then?"

"Not too many."

"The deuse!"

"M. de Mazarin was not severe enough."

"Ah! you want a suspicious government; our former cardinal."

"Yes; under his management it went prosperously. The brother of his gray eminence made his fortune here."

"Believe me, my dear governor," said Aramis, drawing nearer to Baisemeaux, "a young king is equivalent to an old cardinal. Youth has its mistrusts, its anger, its passions, as well as age its hatreds, its precautions, its fears. Have you paid your three years profits to Louvière and Tremblay?"

"Oh! good lord, yes."

"So that all which now remains to be paid, is the sum of fifty thousand livres, which I have brought to you."

"Yes."

"And you have not laid by any thing?"

"Ah! my lord, in giving fifty thousand livres on my part to those gentlemen, I can assure you I give them all I make. It is just what I said only last night to M. d'Artagnan."

"Ah!" cried Aramis, his eyes sparkling suddenly, but this expression was instantly extinguished. "Ah! you saw M. d'Artagnan last night; and how is my good dear friend?"

"Admirably well."

"And what was it that you told him, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I was telling him," said the governor, without at all perceiving the blunder he had committed, "I was telling him that I fed my prisoners too well."

"How many have you," carelessly inquired Aramis.

"Sixty."

"Ah! ah! that is a tolerably round number"

"Oh! monseigneur, in former times there were years in which there were as many as two hundred."

"But even with a minimum of sixty there is no great reason to complain."

"No, undoubtedly, for to any one but me, every one of them ought to give a profit of a hundred and fifty pistoles."

"A hundred and fifty pistoles!"

"Assuredly; it is easily calculated. For a prince of the blood, for instance, I have fifty livres a day."

"Only that you do not happen to have a prince of the blood; at least I imagine so," observed Aramis with a slightly tremulous voice.

"No; thank heaven! that is to say, no, unfortunately."

"How! unfortunately?"

"Undoubtedly; my place would be so much the more lucrative."

"That is true."

"I have, therefore, fifty livres for a prince of the blood—"

"Yes."

"For every marshal of France, thirty-six livres."

"But you have not, at the present moment, more marshals than princes of the blood—have you?"

"Alas! no. It is true that lieutenant-generals and brigadier-generals are at twenty-four livres, and I have two of them."

"Ha! ha!"

"Then come the parliament counsellors who bring me in fifteen livres."

"And how many have you of them?"

"I have four."

"I did not know that the counsellors were so profitable, remarked Aramis.

"Yes; but from fifteen livres, I fall at once to ten."

"To ten?"

"Yes, for ordinary judges, for a defending counsel, for ecclesiastics, ten livres."

"And you have seven of them? a good affair!"

"No, it is bad enough."

"And how so?"

"Would you then not have me treat these poor people, who are something in short, as well as I treat a parliament counsellor?"

"In good truth, you are right; I do not see that there can be five livres difference between them."

"You will readily comprehend that if I have a good fish I must pay four or five livres for it; a good fowl always costs me a livre and a half. I fatten a

good many that I bring up in my poultry yard, but I am obliged to buy corn for them and you cannot imagine what an army of rats we have here."

"Well then, why do you not have half a dozen cats to oppose to them?"

"Oh! I dare say, why the rats eat them! only judge from that how they treat my corn. I was obliged to give up the cats. I am compelled to have terriers, which I import from England, to destroy the rats; those dogs have a most ferocious appetite, they eat as much as a prisoner of the fifth class, without calculating that every now and then they strangle my rabbits and my fowls."

Was Aramis listening or not? No one could have solved that question. His cast down eyes announced a man completely absorbed.

Aramis was meditating.

"I was telling you then," said Baisemeaux, "that a tolerably good fowl costs me a livre and a half, and a good fish four or five livres. They have three meals a day at the Bastille, for prisoners having nothing to do are always eating. A man who is rated at ten livres costs me seven livres ten sous."

"But you said just now that a man at ten livres, was as well treated by you as those at fifteen."

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well! you must therefore gain seven livres and a half upon those at fifteen livres?"

"There must be some compensation," remarked Baisemeaux, who saw that he had allowed himself to be caught.

"You are right, my dear governor; but have you not prisoners at a lower rate than ten livres?"

"Oh! yes, that I have; we have our citizens and lawyers."

"Ah! I thought so; and what are they rated at?"

"At five livres."

"Do they eat, those people?"

"Yes, by heaven! but you will readily imagine that it is not every day they get a sole or a fat fowl, nor Spanish wines at all their meals. But in short, three times a week, they have a good dish for their dinner."

"But this is sheer philanthropy, my dear governor, and you must be ruining yourself."

"No; for you must understand that when the fifteen livres has not finished his fowl, or that ten livres has left some good pickings, I send them to the five

livres. It is a regular feast for the poor devil. What would you have me do? One must be charitable."

"And about how much do you gain on the five livres?"

"Thirty sous."

"Well, well, you are an honest man Baisemeaux."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"No; I mean it really I declare to you."

"And I hope you are right, Monseigneur. But do you know for whom I suffer most?"

"No."

"Well then, it is for the minor citizens, and sheriff's clerks who are rated at only three livres. Those do not often see carps from the Rhine, nor sturgeons from the channel."

"Good! and do not the five livres leave by chance some fragments?"

"Oh! Monseigneur, do not I beg of you imagine that I am niggardly to such a degree as that, and I delight the hearts of the minor citizens and sheriff's clerks, by giving them, the wing of a red legged partridge, a fillet of venison, a slice of a truffled pie; dishes which they had never before seen but in their dreams; in short the remains from the table of the twenty-five livres; they eat, they drink, and at the dessert they cry "long live the king," and bless the Bastille. With two bottles of very decent champagne, which cost me five sous each, I make them regularly drunk on Sunday. Oh! these are the men who bless me, the men who regret the prison when they are obliged to leave it. Can you guess what I have remarked?"

"No, really I cannot."

"Well! I have remarked—and it really does honor to my house—I have remarked that certain prisoners when they have been liberated, manage to get sent back again almost immediately. And what could this be for, if not to enjoy the good things from my kitchen? Oh! but it is true to the very letter—"

Aramis smiled with an air of doubt.

"You smile?"

"Yes,"

"I tell you that we have names that have been registered three times in the course of two years."

"Oh! said Aramis still more doubtfully, "to believe such an anomaly as that, one should actually see it."

"And I can prove it to you, although it is strictly forbidden to show the registers to any one. But you, Mon

seigneur, if you wish to be convinced by seeing it with your own eyes—"

"I acknowledge, that it would much please me."

"Well then it shall be so."

Baisemeaux went to a cupboard and took from it a large book.

Aramis followed every movement with eager eyes.

Baisemeaux returned, placed the book upon the table, which proved to be the register in which were entered the names of every person incarcerated in the Bastille, and after turning over the leaves for an instant stopped at the letter M.

"There," said he "is an instance, do you see that?"

"What?"

"Martinier, January, 1659.—Martinier, June, 1660.—Martinier, March 1661, for pamphlets, Mazarinades, &c.* You will readily understand that this was a mere pretext, for people were not sent to the Bastille for Mazarinades—the fellow would go and denounce himself in order to get sent here. And what could be his object, Monseigneur? Why solely to get back and enjoy my good fare at three livres."

"At three livres! the unhappy wretch."

"Yes, Monseigneur; a poet is ranked in the last class; he has but the food allowed to a minor citizen and sheriff's clerk; but as I told you it is precisely those whom I like to surprise with my good fare."

Aramis during this was mechanically turning over the leaves of the register, continuing to read without appearing to take any interest in the names he met with.

"In 1661, you see there were eighty imprisonments; in 1659, eighty."

"Ah! Seldon," said Aramis; "it appears to me I know that name. Was it not you who spoke to me of this young man?"

"Yes! yes! a poor devil of a student, who made a—what do you call that sort of latin verse—a verse of two lines—that—"

"A distich."

"Yes; that is it."

"The unhappy youth! for a distich."

"The deusel! how lightly you treat it. Do you know that this distich was against the Jesuits?"

"No matter; the punishment, in my opinion, is too severe."

"You need not pity him; last year you appeared much interested for him."

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, then, as your interest is all powerful here, monseigneur, from that very day I treat him as a fifteen livres."

"Just like this one," said Aramis, who had continued turning over the leaves, and who had paused at one of the names which followed that of Martinier.

"Precisely as I do that one."

"Is this Marchiali an Italian?" inquired Aramis, pointing to the name which had attracted his attention.

"Hush!" cried Baisemeaux.

"And why hush?" said Aramis, involuntarily clenching his hand.

"I thought I had already spoken to you of this, Marchiali."

"No; this is the first time I have ever heard that name pronounced," said Aramis.

"That is possible. I may have spoken of him without mentioning his name."

"Is he an old sinner?" inquired Aramis, endeavoring to smile.

"No; on the contrary he is very young."

"Ah! ah! his crime must be a very serious one."

"Unpardonable."

"He has committed some assassination?"

"Pshaw."

"Committed arson?"

"Pshaw."

"Calumniated?"

"Why no. It is he who—"

And Baisemeaux leaned towards Aramis, and placing both hands to his mouth so as to form an ear-trumpet, he in an almost inaudible whisper, said:—

"It is he who has permitted himself to resemble the—"

"Ah! yes, yes," said Aramis. "I now remember, in fact, that you spoke of him to me last year; but the crime appeared to me so trivial."

"Trivial?"

"Or, rather, so involuntary."

"Monseigneur, it is not involuntarily that such a likeness is assumed."

"I had, in short, forgotten it, and that is the fact; but listen, my dear host," said Aramis, closing the register, "I think some one is calling us."

Baisemeaux took the register, hastened back with it to the cupboard, which he shut, and put the key in his pocket.

"Would it please you, monseigneur, to breakfast," said he, "for you were

* Political attacks against Cardinal Mazarin

not mistaken; they are calling us to breakfast."

"At your good pleasure, my dear governor." And they went into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XIX.

M. BAISEMEAUX' BREAKFAST.

ARAMIS was usually very abstemious: but on this occasion, although cautious with regard to wine, he did honour to Baisemeaux' breakfast, which, moreover, was excellent.

The latter, for his part, was extravagantly joyous. The sight of the five thousand pistoles, upon which he every now and then turned his eyes, gladdened his heart.

From time to time he would gaze on Aramis with grateful affection.

The latter reclining in his arm-chair, sipping a few drops of wine which he savored with the delight of a real *connaisseur*:

"Let no one in future speak unfavorably to me of the fare in the Bastille," said he, twinkling his eyes; "happy the prisoners who have only a pint of this fine Burgundy every day."

"All the fifteen livres drink it," said Baisemeaux. "It is very old Volnay."

"So that our poor student, our Seldon, has this excellent Volnay?"

"Oh! no, by no means."

"I thought I heard you say that he was at fifteen livres."

"What he? Oh! never. A man who wrote a district—what was it that you called it?"

"A distich."

"At fifteen livres! Do you suppose they would rate such a man at fifteen livres? I treat him better than the rest on your account. He has good wine, but not this Volnay. It is his neighbor who is at fifteen livres."

"His neighbor?"

"Yes."

"Which of them?"

"The other; the second Bertaudière."

"You will excuse me, my dear governor, but you speak a language which requires a certain apprenticeship to understand it."

"That is true, and I beg your pardon. Second Bertaudière, do you see, means to say the person who occupies

the second story in the tower called la Bertaudière."

"So that Bertaudière is the name of one of the towers in the Bastille? I had, indeed, been told that every tower had a separate name. And whereabouts is this tower?"

"Come to the window, and I will show it to you. The second tower, there, on the left."

"I see it. Ah! that is the place where the fifteen livres is confined."

"Yes."

"And how long has he been there?"

"Oh, about seven or eight years."

"About! Do you not know your dates more precisely than that?"

"It was not since I was made governor, my dear Monsieur d'Herblay."

"But Louvière, but Tremblay—it would seem to me that they should have informed you."

"Oh! my dear sir,—but I beg your pardon—monseigneur, I would say—"

"Never mind the title—you were saying—"

"I was about to say, that the secrets of the Bastille are not transferred with its key."

"Ah! then, this prisoner is a mystery—a state secret?"

"A state secret! no, I do not think it is. It is a secret, as is every thing that is done in the Bastille."

"That I understand; but why then should you speak more freely of Seldon than of—"

"Than of the second Bertaudière?"

"Yes."

"Why, because in my opinion the crime of a man who has composed a distich is less great than that of a man who resembles the—"

"Yes, yes, I comprehend you; but the turnkeys—"

"Well, what of the turnkeys?"

"They converse with the prisoners."

"Undoubtedly."

"Then the prisoners will naturally tell them they are not guilty."

"They talk of nothing else, it is the general formula, their universal hymn."

"Yes; but now tell me; that resemblance which you just now spoke of—"

"Pray, proceed."

"Does it not also strike your turnkeys?"

"Oh! my dear Monsieur d'Herblay, men must be courtiers like yourself, to pay attention to these minutiae."

"You are perfectly right, my dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux. Another drop of that Volnay if you please."

"Not a drop, a glass."

"No, no; you are still a mousquetaire, even to the tips of your fingers, while I, on the contrary, have become a bishop. A drop for me, a whole glass for you."

"Well, be it as you please."

Aramis and the governor touched glasses.

"And then," said Aramis raising the liquid ruby to the level of his eye as if he wished that every sense should be delighted, "and then what you consider a resemblance, another would not even remark."

"Oh! yes they would; that is to say, any one who knows the person to whom he resembles."

"I think, my dear de Baisemeaux, that this is merely a flight of your imagination."

"It is not, upon my word."

"Hear me," said Aramis; "I have seen many who resemble the person we are speaking of, but from respect no one would mention it."

"That may be; but there are likenesses and likenesses; this one is most striking, and if you saw him—"

"And what then?"

"Why you would yourself, acknowledge it."

"If I were to see him," said Aramis in a careless tone; "but, in all probability, I shall never see him."

"And why not?"

"Because were I to put my foot into one of those horrible dungeons, I should imagine myself buried for ever."

"Oh! no, the apartment is comfortable."

"You cannot make me believe that."

"How! not believe it?"

"I would not believe it from your merely saying so; that is all."

"Allow me; allow me—pray do not speak ill of our second Bertaudière. The deuse! it is a good room, very nicely furnished, and has a carpet."

"Indeed?"

"Yes! yes! that young man has not been so very unfortunate. The best lodging in the Bastille has been given to him. Is he not lucky?"

"Come, come," said Aramis, "I see you wish me to believe there can be good lodgings in the Bastille; and as to your carpets—"

"Well! as to my carpets. . ."

"Why, they exist only in your imagination. I see there spiders, rats, and even toads."

"Toads!"

"In the dungeons."

"Oh! in the dungeons, I will not deny that."

"But I see there no furniture, and not even the shadow of a carpet."

"Are you a man who wishes to be convinced by your own eyes?" cried Baisemeaux, energetically.

"No! by heaven! no."

"But to assure yourself of that resemblance, which you seem to doubt as much as you do the existence of the carpets?"

"A spectre! a shadow! an unfortunate dying wretch!"

"Oh! not at all; a young fellow as hardy as the Pont Neuf."

"Sorrowful and sulky!"

"Not in the least—playful on the contrary."

"Oh! that's impossible!"

"'Tis precisely the word; I have uttered it and do not retract it."

"It is incredible."

"Come then."

"Where?"

"With me."

"And for what purpose?"

"To take a turn in the Bastille."

"How?"

"You shall see, you shall see, and with your own eyes."

"And the regulations?"

"Oh! that matters not. It is my major's day for going out; the lieutenant is going his round on the bastions; we are therefore completely our own masters."

"No, no, dear governor. The mere thought of hearing the bolts and bars drawn back makes me shudder."

"Oh! that is nothing."

"But were you by chance to leave me in some third or fourth Bertaudière. Prroooh—it makes one shiver!"

"You are surely jesting?"

"No; I am speaking seriously."

"You are refusing a rare chance. Do you know that to obtain the favor which I gratuitously offer to you, certain princes of the blood have offered fifty thousand lives?"

"Really! it must then be very curious."

"Forbidden fruit, monseigneur, forbidden fruit; but you who are of the church must know that."

"No: had I any curiosity it would be to see that poor student—the one who wrote the distich."

"Well, he is precisely in the third Bertaudière."

"Why do you say precisely?"

"Because, if I had any preference it

would be for the nice carpeted room, and its occupant."

"Pshaw! furniture is but a common place affair; an unmeaning face is altogether uninteresting."

"A fifteen livres, monseigneur, a fifteen livres is always interesting."

"Ah! that reminds me of a question I had to ask you. Why should this one be rated at fifteen livres, and poor Seldon at only three?"

"Oh! this distinction is a superb matter, my dear sir, and by it is demonstrated the great goodness of the king!"

"Of the king! of the king?"

"Of the cardinal, I meant to say. 'This unfortunate man,' said M. de Mazarin to himself, 'is destined to remain a prisoner all his life.'"

"And why?"

"His crime being as lasting as himself, consequently the punishment must be so too."

"What, for life?"

"Undoubtedly. Unless indeed he should have the good luck to catch the small-pox. And that is but a poor chance too, for the air of the Bastille is by no means unhealthy."

"Nothing can be more ingenious than your reasoning, dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux."

"It is just, is it not?"

"Do you mean to say that this unfortunate man, having before him a life of suffering to which there is to be no term—"

"Suffering, monseigneur, I did not say that. A fifteen livres does not suffer."

"He suffers from imprisonment, at least."

"Admitted; but that is a fatality. But that suffering is rendered lighter to him. In short, you must allow that this young fellow did not come into this world to eat all the good things which are now put before him. By heaven! you shall see. We have here now a pie we have not touched, those cray-fish of which we have eaten but two or three, cray-fish from the Marne, as big as lobsters. Well! all this will find its way to the second Bertaudière, with a bottle of this Volnay, which you think so good. And then, having seen all this, you will, I hope, no longer doubt."

"No, my dear governor no; but in all this you think only of the thrice happy fifteen livres, and you entirely forget poor Seldon, my protégé."

"Well, then, in consideration of the interest you evince towards him, it shall be a feast-day for him; he shall have some sponge cakes and preserves and that bottle of Port."

"You are a worthy man, my dear Baisemeaux; I told you so before, and I now repeat it."

"Let us go, let us go!" cried Baisemeaux, somewhat confused with the wine he had drunk, and by the praises of Aramis.

"Remember, it is only to oblige you that I agree to accompany you."

"Oh! you will thank me for it when we return."

"Well, then, let us go."

"One minute—until I have summoned a turnkey."

Baisemeaux rang twice; a man came in.

"I am going to the towers!" cried the governor, "but I want no guards, no drums—no noise, in short."

"If I did not leave my cloak here," said Aramis, affecting some alarm, "I should really believe that I were going to prison on my own account."

The turnkey walked on before the governor; Aramis walked on his right hand. Some soldiers who were sauntering about the court-yard drew themselves up as stiff as stakes and saluted the governor as he passed by them.

Baisemeaux and his guest ascended a flight of steps which led to an esplanade, from this they passed over a drawbridge, where the sentries recognized the governor and presented arms to him.

"Sir," then said the governor, turning towards Aramis, and speaking so loudly that the sentries could hear every word he uttered, "sir, you have a good memory, have you not?"

"And for what?" inquired Aramis.

"For your plans and measurements; for you know it is not permitted, even to architects, to go into the prisoners' rooms with either paper, pen or pencil."

"Good!" said Aramis to himself, "it appears that I am an architect. Is not this a joke of d'Artagnan's, who found out that I was an engine at Belle-Isle?"

And then continued aloud—

"You need not be uneasy, M. Governor; in our profession the eye and memory are sufficient."

Baisemeaux did not even smile; the sentinels took Aramis for what the appeared to be

"Well, let us go first to the Bertaudière," rejoined Baisemeaux, still loud enough to be heard by the sentinels.

"As you please, sir," replied Aramis.

Then addressing himself to the turnkey—

"You will take advantage of this to take the delicacies to number two I mentioned to you."

"And number three, dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux; you always forget number three," whispered Aramis.

"That is true," replied the governor.

And they went up the steps.

The locks, bolts and bars for that courtyard alone, would have sufficed for the security of a whole city.

Aramis was neither a dreamer nor a man of sensibility; he had made verses in his youth, but he was a man whose generous impulses had become withered, as is the case with most men at fifty-five, who have been very fond of women, or rather, who have been much loved by them.

But when he placed his foot on the worn steps, by which so many unhappy men had ascended; when he felt himself saturated with the atmosphere of those gloomy vaulted roofs, damp with tears, he was undoubtedly affected, for he bent down his head, and his eyes were humid: he followed Baisemeaux, without addressing a word to him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE NO. 2 OF LA BERTAUDIÈRE.

WHEN they reached the second story, whether it was from fatigue or from emotion, the visiter was completely out of breath.

He leaned for support against the wall.

"Will you begin by this one?" said Baisemeaux. "Since we are to go to both, it matters not—so it appears to me—whether we go up from the second to the third, or come down from the third to the second. There are more-over certain repairs," he hastily added in a louder tone, for the turnkey was within hearing, "which you will have to attend to in this room."

"No! no!" eagerly cried Aramis, "higher, higher, M. Governor, if you please, the upper story must be done first."

They continued to ascend.

"Tell the turnkey to give you the keys," whispered Aramis.

"I will do so."

Baisemeaux took the keys and opened the door of No. 3. The turnkey was the first to enter it, and placed upon the table the provisions, which the good governor called his delicacies.

And then he left the room.

The prisoner had not moved.

Then Baisemeaux went in, while Aramis remained standing on the threshold of the door.

From there he could perceive the prisoner, a youth about eighteen years of age, who was lying on his bed, and who, on hearing the unaccustomed noise, and perceiving the governor, jumped out of it, and, with clasped hands, cried:

"My mother! oh! my mother!"

The accents of this young man were so fraught with anguish that Aramis shuddered in despite of himself.

"My dear guest!" said Baisemeaux to him, endeavoring to smile, "I bring to you something that will divert your mind, and something extra for your bodily comforts. Here is this gentleman, who is going to measure your room to make some alterations, and here are some preserves for your desert."

"Oh! sir, sir," cried the young man, "condemn me to perfect solitude during a whole year, give me but bread and water, but promise me that at the end of that one year I shall be released from this, that at the end of that year I shall see my mother."

"But my dear friend," said Baisemeaux, "I have heard you say, yourself, that your mother is very poor, that you were badly lodged when you lived with her, while here, on the contrary—"

"If she was poor, sir, that is only a more urgent reason for restoring to her the only support she had; badly lodged, sir, oh! we are always well lodged when free."

"In short, since you said that you had only written that one unfortunate distich—"

"And without any evil intention, without any intention, I swear to you. I was reading Martial, when the idea first presented itself. Oh! sir, let me be punished; let them cut off the hand with which I wrote it, and I will work with the other; but let me be restored to my mother."

"My child," replied Baisemeaux, "you know that this depends not upon me; all I can do is to increase your

rations, give you a glass of port, and slip a sponge cake or two between two plates."

"Oh! my God! my God!" exclaimed the poor young man, throwing himself down and rolling in anguish on the floor.

Aramis finding it impossible to support this heart-rending scene any longer, withdrew to the landing-place.

"The unhappy boy!" murmured he, in a low voice.

"Oh! yes, sir, he is very unhappy," observed the jailer, "but it is his parents' fault."

"And how so?"

"To be sure—why did they make him learn Latin? Too much knowledge, do you see, sir, does harm. Now I, I do not know how to read or write: and so I am not in prison."

Aramis looked at this man, who called it not being in prison to be a jailer in the Bastille.

As to Baisemeaux, perceiving the little effect his consolations and his Port wine had produced, he came out of the room much agitated.

"Well! and the door! the door!" cried the jailer, "you are forgetting to lock the door."

"Ah! that's true," said Baisemeaux, "Here! here! take the keys."

"I will apply for the pardon of this child," said Aramis.

"And if you cannot obtain it," rejoined Baisemeaux, "ask, at least, that he may be rated at ten livres; both he and I would be the gainers by it."

"If the other prisoner should call for his mother in the same way," said Aramis, "I would rather not go in: I will measure the room from the outside."

"Oh! oh!" said the jailer, "you need not be afraid, M. Architect; that one is as gentle as a lamb; he would be obliged to speak to call his mother, and he does not open his mouth at all."

"Well then, let us go in," said Aramis in a hollow tone.

"Oh! sir," said the turnkey, "are you architect to the prisons."

"Yes."

"And you are not used to these sort of things—it is astonishing!"

Aramis saw that in order not to excite suspicion, it would be necessary to keep his feelings more under command.

Baisemeaux again took the keys, and opened the door.

"Remain outside," said he to the jailer, "and wait for us at the bottom of the stairs."

The turnkey obeyed and went down stairs.

Baisemeaux went in first and opened a second door.

By a strong ray of light which came in through the grated window, they perceived a young man, of small proportions, with short hair, whose beard had already begun to grow; he was seated on a low stool, his elbow resting on an arm chair against which the upper part of his body was also leaning.

His coat, which he had thrown off, was of fine black velvet, and he was inhaling the fresh air which came in through the open window and blew into the bosom of his shirt which was of the finest cambric.

When the governor entered the room, the young man turned his head towards him with a listless air, but on recognizing Baisemeaux, he rose up and courteously saluted him.

But when his eyes fell upon Aramis who had remained in the darker part of the room, the latter shuddered, he turned pale, and his hat, which he held in his hand fell to the ground as if all his muscles had become unstrung at that moment.

Baisemeaux, during this time, being accustomed to the presence of his prisoner, did not appear to participate in the sensations evinced by Aramis; he laid out on the table his truffled pie and his cray-fish, as would have done a pains-taking servant. Being thus occupied he did not observe the agitation of his guest.

But when he had finished he addressed the young prisoner.

"You look remarkably well; I hope you are so."

"I thank you, sir, I am quite well," replied the young man.

At hearing this voice Aramis was near falling. In spite of himself he advanced a step with dilated eyes and trembling lips.

This movement was so visible that it did not escape Baisemeaux, although so pre-occupied.

"Here is an architect, who has come to examine your chimney," said Baisemeaux "does it smoke?"

"Never, sir."

"You said but now, that no one could be happy while in prison," said the governor rubbing his hands with glee, "here is an instance of a prisoner

who is so. You do not complain of any thing?"

"Never."

"But do you not feel weary of this place?" said Aramis.

"Never."

"Well!" said Baisemeaux in a whisper, "was I not right?"

"Why, it cannot be otherwise, my dear governor, a man must yield to evidence. Is it permitted to ask him a few questions?"

"As many as you please."

"Well then, have the goodness to ask him if he knows why he was sent here?"

"This gentleman has requested me to ask you," said Baisemeaux, "if you know the cause of your detention."

"No, sir," replied the young man unaffectedly, "I do not know it."

"Why that is impossible," cried Aramis carried away by his feelings, "had you been ignorant of the cause of your detention it would have made you furious."

"I was so during the first days."

"And why are you not so now?"

"Because I have reflected."

"It is strange," said Aramis.

"Is it not really astonishing?" observed Baisemeaux.

"And may I be allowed to ask, sir," continued Aramis, "what was the nature of your reflections?"

"I reflected that not having committed any crime, God could not mean to punish me."

"But what is a prison then," pursued Aramis, "if it be not a punishment?"

"Alas!" replied the young man, "I know not, all that I can tell you is, that it is very different from the life I led seven years ago."

"From hearing what you say, sir, on seeing your resignation, one would be inclined to believe that you like your prison."

"I endure it."

"It is then with the certainty of being one day at liberty."

"I have no certainty, sir; I have hope and nothing more; and yet, I acknowledge, that hope diminishes day by day."

"But why should you not now be free, since once you were so?"

"That is precisely the reason," replied the young man, "which prevents my expecting to be liberated, why should I have been imprisoned, if it was intended I should again be at liberty?"

"How old are you?"

"I do not know."

"What is your name?"

"I have forgotten the name which was given to me."

"Your parents?"

"I have never known them."

"But those who brought you up?"

"They did not call me their son."

"Did you love any one before you were brought here?"

"My nurse and my flowers."

"And was that all?"

"I also loved my valet."

"You regret that nurse and your valet?"

"I wept much when they died."

"Did they die since you came here, or before?"

"They died the day before I was carried off."

"Both at the same time?"

"Both at the same time."

"And how were you carried off?"

"A man came in search of me, and made me get into a carriage, which was then locked up, and he brought me here."

"Would you recognize that man?"

"He wore a mask."

"Is not this an extraordinary history?" said Baisemeaux, in a whisper, to Aramis.

The latter could scarcely breathe.

"But that which is still more extraordinary," added Baisemeaux, "is, that he has never told me so much of it as he has just told you."

"That may have happened," replied Aramis, "because, perhaps, you never questioned him."

"Ah! that is possible," replied Baisemeaux. "I am not inquisitive; but you see the room; it is a handsome one, is it not?"

"Very handsome."

"A carpet—"

"Superb."

"I would wager that he had not so good a one before coming here."

"I believe it."

Then turning to the young man:

"Do you not remember having been visited by some strange lady or gentleman?" inquired Aramis.

"Oh! yes, three times by a lady, who every time stopped in a carriage at the door, and came into the house, her face covered with a veil, which she took off only when we were alone."

"Do you remember this lady?"

"Yes."

"What said she to you?"

The young man smiled sorrowfully.

"She asked me just what you have asked me, whether I was happy and did not feel weary. And when she came and went away she clasped me in her arms, pressed me to her heart, and kissed me."

"You recollect her?"

"Perfectly."

"I mean to ask you whether you well remember her features?"

"Yes."

"Then you could recognize her were chance to lead you to her?"

"Oh! most assuredly."

A fitting ray of satisfaction passed over the features of Aramis.

At that moment Baisemeaux heard the turnkey reascending the stairs.

"Had we not better withdraw?" said he, eagerly, to Aramis.

Probably Aramis had gained all the information he had desired.

"Whenever you please," he replied.

The young man saw that they were preparing to leave him, and bowed politely to them.

Baisemeaux replied to it by a slight inclination of the head. Aramis feeling doubtless a great respect for the young man's misfortunes made a profound bow to the prisoner.

They left the room; Baisemeaux closing the door after them.

"Well!" exclaimed Baisemeaux, as they were going down stairs, "what do you say to all this?"

"I have discovered the secret, my dear governor," replied Aramis.

"Really! and what is this secret?"

"There was an assassination committed in that house."

"Do you really think so?"

"Do you not see that the valet and the nurse both died on the same day?"

"And what then?"

"Poison!"

"Ah! ah!"

"What do you think of it?"

"That it really might be the case."

"What! that this young man could be the assassin?"

"And who would imagine that? How could such a child be an assassin?"

"It is precisely what I was saying. The crime was committed in his house, and that's enough. Perhaps he saw the perpetrators, and they are afraid that he might speak of it."

"The deuce! if I knew that."

"Well?"

"I would redouble my precautions."

"Oh! he does not appear to have the slightest desire to escape."

"Ah! you do not know what prisoners are."

"Has he books?"

"Oh! by no means; it is expressly forbidden to let him have them."

"Positively."

"Under the hand-writing of Mazarin himself."

"And have you that note?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; would you like to see it when you go in to take your cloak?"

"I should have no objection. I am very curious with regard to autographs."

"That one is in a magnificent hand-writing. There is only one alteration in it."

"Ah! ah! an alteration; and of what nature is this alteration?"

"It is merely in a figure."

"A figure?"

"Yes. In the first place it had been written board at 50 livres."

"Then it was at the same rate as princes of the blood."

"But the cardinal must have seen that he had made a mistake, as you will readily understand; he effaced the 0 and added a 1 before the 5. But, by-the-by—"

"What?"

"You do not say a word about the resemblance."

"I do not speak of it, my dear Monseigneur de Baisemeaux, for a very simple reason. I do not speak of it because it does not exist."

"Oh! that now is too much!"

"Or, if it does exist, it exists in your imagination; and even if it should exist in the minds of others you would do well not to speak of it."

"Really!"

"You will easily comprehend that the king, Louis XIV., would not be well pleased that you should continue to keep alive a rumor that one of his subjects so much resembled him."

"That is true! that is true!" replied Baisemeaux, quite alarmed; "but I have spoken of it only to you, monseigneur, and you well know that I feel perfectly assured of your discretion."

"Oh! you need be under no apprehension."

"Would you still wish to see the note," said Baisemeaux, somewhat staggered.

"Undoubtedly."

And while thus conversing they had returned to the governor's house. Baisemeaux took from the cupboard a private register, of the same form as the

one he had before shown to Aramis, but this one was secured by a lock.

The key which opened this lock was one of a small bunch that Baisemeaux always carried about him.

Then placing the book upon the table, he opened it at the letter M, and showed Aramis the following note in the column of "Remarks;"

"NEVER ANY BOOKS; linen of the very finest quality; clothes, elegant; WALKING NOT TO BE ALLOWED. NO CHANGE OF TURNKEYS. NO COMMUNICATIONS."

"Musical instruments; all license as to bodily comforts; board at fifteen livres. M. de Baisemeaux may make extra charge, should the fifteen livres be insufficient."

"Ah! that is true; I had forgotten that. I will claim something more."

Aramis closed the book.

"Yes," said he, "that is, in truth, written by M. de Mazarin; I recognize his hand-writing. And now, my dear governor," continued he, as if this last proof had exhausted all his interest in the matter, "let us now proceed to our own little arrangements."

"Well; what time would you wish me to insert; fix it yourself," replied Baisemeaux.

"Oh! do not state any time; write me a simple acknowledgment for 150,000 livres."

"And payable—"

"On my demand. But you will clearly understand that I shall not demand it, but when you shall yourself desire it."

"Oh!" cried Baisemeaux, smiling, "I am perfectly at ease on that score; but I have already given you two receipts for fifty thousand livres each."

"And here you see that I destroy them."

And Aramis after showing the two receipts to the governor at once tore them up.

Overcome by such a mark of confidence, Baisemeaux without hesitation, signed a note payable on the demand of the prelate for one hundred and fifty thousand livres.

Aramis who had observed what the governor was writing by looking over his shoulder, put the obligation in his pocket book without appearing to have read it.

"And now," said Aramis, "you would not feel angry with me, would you, if I were to carry off one of your prisoners?"

"And how so?"

"Why by obtaining a pardon for him undoubtedly. Did I not, for instance, tell you, that I felt interested for that poor Seldon?"

"Ah! that is true."

"Well then?"

"That is your concern; do as you think proper. I know that your arms are long, and that your hands are always open."

"Adieu! adieu!"

And Aramis took leave bearing with him the governor's most fervent benedictions.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TWO FEMALE FRIENDS.

At the time when M. de Baisemeaux was introducing Aramis to the two prisoners at the Bastille, a carriage stopped before the door of Madame de Bellière, and even at that early hour a lady alighted from it wrapped up in a silk mantle, and ascended the front steps.

When Madame Vanel was announced to Madame Bellière, the latter was occupied, or we should say absorbed in the perusal of a letter, which she precipitately concealed.

She had but just finished her morning toilette, her waiting women were still in the adjacent room.

On hearing the name and the hurried steps of Marguerite Vanel, Madame de Bellière ran to meet her. She thought that she perceived in her friends' eyes a brilliancy which was neither that of health nor of joy.

Marguerite embraced her, shook hands cordially, and hardly allowed her time to utter a word.

"You are forgetting me altogether, my dear friend," said she, "you are giving yourself up entirely to the pleasures of the court?"

"How so? why I was not even present at the marriage festivities."

"What are you about then?"

"I am preparing to go to Bellière."

"To Bellière?"

"Yes."

"You intend to become a perfect rustic. I like to see you in such a mood. But you are pale."

"No, my health is excellent."

"So much the better, I felt uneasy

about you. You cannot conceive what has been said of you."

"People say so many things."

"Oh! but this is perfectly extraordinary."

"You like to keep your audience in suspense, Marguerite."

"Well, I will tell you; only I am afraid you will be angry."

"Oh! that could never be; you have often admired my equanimity."

"Well then, do you know it is said—but no, I can never tell it you."

"Then say no more about it," cried Madame de Bellière, who foresaw that this long preamble concealed some malicious report, but who nevertheless felt devoured by curiosity.

"Well then, my dear marquise, it is said that for some time past you have much less regretted our late dear M. de Bellière, poor man!"

"It is an ill-natured rumor, Marguerite; I regret, and shall for ever regret, my husband; but he has now been dead two years. I am only twenty-eight, and the grief which his death occasions me ought not to cast a gloom over my whole existence, on every action of my life; and were I to say it would be so, even you, Marguerite, you, the most devoted of all wives, would not believe me."

"And why not; your heart is so very tender?" maliciously replied Madame Vanel.

"And that is your case, too, Marguerite, and I have not seen that you allowed yourself to be overwhelmed with grief, when your heart was wounded."

These words were a direct allusion to the rupture which had taken place between Marguerite and the superintendent. They were also a reproach; veiled indeed, but directly addressed to the heart of Madame Vanel.

As if she had only awaited this signal to let fly her arrow, Marguerite exclaimed—

"Well, then, it is said that you are in love;" and she intently fixed her eyes on Madame de Bellière, who could not prevent herself from blushing.

"The world is always ready to calumniate women," replied the marchioness, after a moment's pause.

"Oh! you have not been calumniated, Elise."

"How! People have said that I am in love, and yet they have not calumniated me?"

"In the first place, if it be true, it is no calumny, it is merely scandal. And besides, for you did not allow me to conclude my sentence, the world does not say that you abandon yourself to this love. On the contrary, it represents you as a virtuous inamorata, armed with claws and teeth, shutting yourself up in your own house as in a fortress, and in a fortress still more impenetrable than that of Danæ, although that was built of adamant."

"You are so witty, Marguerite," observed Madame de Bellière, trembling.

"You have always flattered me, Elise; in short, they say that you are incorruptible and inaccessible. You can therefore judge whether you have been calumniated. But what can you be dreaming of while I am speaking to you?"

"Who—I?"

"Yes, you are quite red, and you do not say a word."

"I was endeavoring to discover," replied the marchioness, whose fine eyes began to flash with incipient anger, "to what you could have made allusion, you, who are so well versed in mythology, when you compared me to Danæ."

"Ha! ha!" cried Marguerite, laughing, "you were endeavoring to discover that—"

"Yes; do you not remember that when we were at the convent together, and were trying to solve arithmetical problems—ah! what I am about to say is also very learned, but it is now my turn—do you not remember that when one of the terms were given we were to discover the other?"

"Well! try then to discover it."

"But I cannot guess what it is you mean?"

"And yet nothing can be more easy."

"You pretend that I am in love, do you not?"

"I have been told so."

"Of course it is not imagined that I am in love with an abstraction. There must be some name connected with this rumor."

"Yes, certes, there is a name."

"Well, then, it is not at all surprising that I should try to discover this name, since you do not tell it me."

"When I saw you blush so deeply, my dear marchioness, I did not think it would take you so long to discover it."

"It was the name *Danæ* that surprised me. Who says *Danæ* says a shower of gold, is it not so?"

"That is to say, *Danæ's* Jupiter transformed himself into a shower of gold."

"My lover, then—the one you have bestowed upon me—"

"Oh! pardon me: I am your friend—I bestow no one on you."

"Be it so; but my enemies?"

"Do you wish me to tell you the name?"

"For the last half hour you have kept me in suspense."

"You are about to hear it—but do not alarm yourself; it is that of a man of powerful influence."

"Good!"

The marchioness clasped her hands so forcibly that her beautifully tapering nails wounded their palms, like a criminal about to undergo the brand of the executioner.

"He is a powerfully rich man," continued Marguerite, "the richest in the world, perhaps. It is, in short—"

The marchioness closed her eyes for a moment.

"It is—the Duke of Buckingham," said Marguerite, laughing boisterously.

This perfidy had been calculated with incredible address. This name which she had so adroitly let fall instead of the one which the marchioness had so tremulously expected, produced the same effect upon the poor lady as the ill-sharpened axes of the executioners had upon Messieurs de Chalan and de Thou; which mangled without killing them.

She however soon recovered herself.

"I was right," said she, "when I called you a witty woman; you have made me spend an agreeable moment. The joke is really delightful. I have never even seen the Duke of Buckingham."

"Never!" exclaimed Marguerite, restraining her laughter.

"I have not stepped across the threshold of my door since the duke arrived in Paris."

"Oh!" rejoined Madame Vanel, stretching her pretty foot towards a paper which was trembling on the carpet near the window. "People may not see, but they may write to each other."

The marchioness shuddered.

This paper was the envelope of the letter which she was reading when her friend came in to the room. This en-

velope was sealed with the arms of the superintendent.

As she drew herself back upon her sofa, Madame de Bellière threw the folds of her ample silk dress over the envelope, and thus concealed it.

"Come now," then said she, "come now, Marguerite, was it merely to tell me all this nonsense that you came so early?"

"No, I came to you, in the first place, to see you and to remind you of our former agreeable and delightful habits, when, as you know, we used to walk in the wood at Vincennes, and then, under an oak or in a thicket, we talked of those we loved and who loved us."

"You came to propose I should go out with you."

"I have my carriage here and am at liberty for three hours."

"I am not dressed, Marguerite—and—if you wish we should converse—with-out going to Vincennes, we can find in the garden of the hotel a good shady tree, or a thick arbor, a grass plat full of daisies, and all the violets which we smell from here."

"My dear marchioness, I regret you should refuse me—I wished to unburden my heart to you."

"I tell you again, Marguerite, that my heart is entirely yours, as fully in this room, and under the avenues of linden trees in my garden, as yonder under the oaks of the forest."

"To me, it is not the same thing; in approaching Vincennes, marchioness, my sighs would be nearer the object towards which during the last few days, all my wishes have tended."

The marchioness suddenly raised her head.

"It surprises you, does it not?" continued Madame Vanel, "that I should still think of Saint-Mandé?"

"You, so proud!" said the marchioness with disdain.

"I—so proud—" replied Madame Vanel, "I am thus constituted—I do not forgive neglect, I do not pardon infidelity. When I leave any one, and they weep, I am tempted still to love; but when they abandon me and laugh, oh! then, I love furiously."

Madame de Bellière, made an involuntary gesture.

"She is jealous," said Marguerite to herself.

"Then," continued the marchioness, "you are marvellously smitten—"

"With the Duke of Buckingham—no, I am mistaken—with M. Fouquet."

She felt the blow, and the blood from every artery rushed back to her heart.

"And you wished to go to Vincennes—even to Saint-Mandé, perhaps?"

"I know not what I wished—you would have counselled me."

"And how?"

"You have often done so."

"On this occasion I certainly should not, for I am not so forgiving as you seem to be—I love less ardently perhaps, but when my heart has once been torn, it is for ever."

"But M. Fouquet has not torn your heart," said Marguerite Vanel, with all the ingenuous candor of a virgin.

"You fully comprehend what I would say—M. Fouquet has not torn my heart—he has not either favored or injured me, but you have good reason to complain of him. You are my friend, I should not therefore advise you in a way that would meet your wishes."

"Ah! you prejudice."

"The sighs of which you spoke but now, are more than indications."

"Oh! you really overwhelm me," suddenly cried Marguerite, summoning up all her strength, as does the gladiator when about to give his decisive blow: "you judge only from my ungoverned passion and my weakness. As to any pure and generous feeling I may possess, you say not a word. If I at this moment feel irresistibly attracted towards the superintendent, if I should take the first step towards a reconciliation, and which I probably shall, it is that the fate of M. Fouquet deeply afflicts me; it is, because at this moment he is, in my opinion the most unfortunate man on earth."

"Ah!" exclaimed the marchioness, pressing her hand to her heart, "then something new has happened?"

"You have not heard then?"

"I have heard nothing," said Madame de Bellière, with that agonizing palpitation, which suspends thoughts and words, which suspends even life itself.

"My dear Elise, in the first place the king's favor has been withdrawn from M. Fouquet, and has been transferred to M. Colbert."

"Yes, it has been so reported."

"It is quite natural, since the discovery of the Belle-Isle conspiracy."

"I had been assured that the discovery of the fortifications there, had only redounded to the honor of M. Fouquet."

Marguerite laughed in so cruel a

manner, that Madame de Bellière would, at that moment, with joy have plunged a dagger in her heart.

"My dear friend," continued Marguerite, "the honor of M. Fouquet is no longer the question: the matter now is how to save him. In three days the ruin of the superintendent will be consummated."

"Oh!" cried the marchioness, smiling in her turn, "that is going rather fast."

"I said three days, because I fain would still lure myself with hope. But very possibly the catastrophe will be brought about in four and twenty hours."

"And for what reason?"

"By the most miserable of all reasons. M. Fouquet has no more money."

"In matters of finance, my dear Marguerite, a man may have no funds to-day, to whom to-morrow brings in millions."

"That might have been the case with M. Fouquet when he had two friends, rich and skilful men, who were constantly amassing for him, and knew how to draw money from every coffer; but those friends are dead."

"Crown pieces do not die, Marguerite; they may be hidden, but they can be discovered; they are bought, and then they are produced."

"You see every thing in favorable colors; so much the better for you. It is unfortunate that you are not the Egeria of M. Fouquet; you would point out to him the spring from which the millions would flow, which the king yesterday demanded from him."

"Millions!" exclaimed the marchioness with terror.

"Four—'tis an even number."

"Infamous woman!" muttered Madame de Bellière, tortured by this ferocious joy.

"M. Fouquet has these four millions, I should imagine," she replied courageously.

"Even should he have the sum the king has asked to-day," observed Marguerite, "he may not perhaps have those which the king will demand in a month."

"The king will again ask him for money?"

"Undoubtedly; and that is why I tell you the ruin of this poor M. Fouquet becomes infallible. His pride will induce him to supply the money, and when he has no more, he will fall."

"That is true," said the marchioness, shuddering, "but tell me, M. Col-

bert's hatred for M. Fouquet must be great."

"I believe he does not like him. Now, M. Colbert is a very powerful man; he gains much on being intimately known; his conceptions are gigantic, he has determination and discretion; he will rise.

"Will he be superintendent?"

"'Tis very probable—and this is why, my dear marchioness, I felt myself moved by compassion towards this poor man, who once loved, nay, adored me; this is why, seeing him in so unhappy a position, I pardoned him his infidelity, of which, I have reason to believe, he now repents; this is why I felt myself induced to offer him some consolation, some good advice; he would have understood my motive and would have been thankful for it. It is soothing to be loved. Men can truly appreciate love when they are no longer blinded by their power.

The marchioness being confused, crushed by these atrocious attacks, which had been calculated and adjusted with the precision of a park of artillery, knew no longer how to reply, she could not even think.

The voice of the perfidious woman had assumed the most affectionate tone; she spoke as a fond woman and concealed the instincts of a panther.

"Well then," said Madame de Bellière, who hoped that Marguerite had ceased to overwhelm a conquered enemy. "Well! why do you not go at once to M. Fouquet?"

"Decidedly, marchioness you have caused me to reflect. No, it would not be decorous that I should make the first advance. M. Fouquet loves me, of that there can be no doubt, but he is too proud. I cannot expose myself to an affront. I have, moreover, my husband to consider. You will not give me your advice. Well then, I will consult M. Colbert on the subject."

She rose up smiling as if about to take leave. The marchioness had not sufficient strength to imitate her.

Marguerite took a few steps in order that she might continue to enjoy the humiliating grief in which she had plunged her rival; then suddenly turning round, she said, "And you do not even accompany me to the door."

The marchioness rose, pale and cold from her sofa, and without paying any farther attention to the envelope which had so much confused her at the commencement of the conversation, and

which the first step she took exposed to view.

She then opened the door of her oratory, and without ever turning her head towards Madame Vanel, entered it and closed the door.

Marguerite said, or rather stammered out three or four words, which Madame de Bellière did not even hear.

But as soon as the marchioness had disappeared, her envious enemy could not resist the desire of assuring herself whether her suspicions had been well founded, and she rushed like a panther and seized the envelope.

"Ah!" cried she, grinding her teeth, "it was then really a letter from M. Fouquet which she was reading when I came in!"

And in her turn, she rushed out of the room.

During this time, the marchioness, as soon as she had closed the door behind her, felt that her strength failed her; for a moment she remained rigid, pale and motionless as a statue that a gust of wind shakes upon its pedestal, then she staggered and fell inanimate upon the carpet.

The noise of her fall resounded at the same instant as that of the rolling of Marguerite's carriage driving out of the court-yard of the hotel.

CHAPTER XXII.

MADAME DE BELLIERE'S PLATE.

THE blow was so much the more painful from its having been altogether unexpected. The marchioness was therefore some time before she recovered herself; but as soon as her consciousness returned she set herself resolutely to reflect on these fearful events as they had been represented to her.

She courageously determined to pursue, even should her life fail in the attempt, the line of ideas which had been induced by her implacable friend.

Treachery, snares, darkly veiled threats, under the semblance of interest for the public good, such must have been the manœuvres of Colbert.

The odious joy of witnessing a speedy downfall, incessant efforts to obtain that end, seductions no less guilty than the crime itself, such must have been the conduct of Marguerite.

The distorted atoms of Descartes

were in the triumphant: to the man without compassion was united the woman without heart.

The marchioness saw with a feeling more of sorrow than of indignation that the king had entered into a plot which evinced that he had inherited the duplicity which Louis XIII. gave proofs of in his later years, and the avarice of Mazarin before he had had time to gorge himself with French gold.

But soon the mind of this courageous woman resumed all its energy, and ceased to retard its action by recollections of the past.

The marchioness was not one of those women who lose their time in weeping when they ought to act, and amuse themselves by pitying a misfortune when they have the means of relieving it.

For about ten minutes her forehead was buried in her ice-cold hands; then, raising her head, with an energetic gesture, she rang for her women.

She had formed her resolution.

"Has every thing been prepared for my departure," inquired she of the waiting woman who answered the bell.

"Yes, madam, but it was not understood that the marchioness intended setting out for Bellière before three o'clock."

"Every thing of value I suppose has already been packed up."

"Yes, madam, but we usually leave every thing of that sort in Paris. In general your ladyship does not take your jewels with you into the country."

"And all that has been packed up, you say?"

"In your ladyship's cabinet."

"And the gold plate?"

"Is in the chests."

"And the silver plate?"

"In the large oaken press."

The marchioness said no more for a moment, but afterwards in a calm voice—

"Let my goldsmith be sent for," said she.

The servant disappeared to execute the order.

The marchioness went into her cabinet, and with the greatest care examined her jewel cases.

She had never so attentively considered these great riches, which usually are the pride of most women. Never had she looked at these ornaments excepting to select them according to

their setting and their color, that they might harmonize with her dress. On this occasion she admired the large size of the rubies and the exquisite water of the diamonds. She felt afflicted if she observed a spot or a defect on them. She thought the gold too light and the stones of wretched quality.

The goldsmith surprised her while thus occupied when he entered the room.

M. Faucheux," said she, "it was you I believe who furnished me with my gold plate?"

"Yes, madam."

"I do not remember how much your account amounted to."

"Do you mean the new, madam, or that which Monsieur de Bellière gave you, when he married you? for I supplied both."

"Well, first of all, the new?"

"Madam, the water jugs, the goblets and the dishes, with their cases, the epergne and the ice-pails, the preserve-dishes and the fountains, cost you, my lady marchioness, sixty thousand livres."

"Not more than that, good Heaven!"

"You thought my account very large."

"That is true, that is true! I recollect. But it was so dear on account of the workmanship, was it not?"

"Yes, madam; the engraving, chasing, and new pattern."

"And how much was the price augmented by the workmanship? Do not hesitate."

"One third of the value, madam; but—"

"We have besides, the old service, the one my husband bought."

"Oh! madam, there is much less work in that, than in the one we are speaking of. The intrinsic value of that is thirty thousand livres."

"Seventy thousand—" murmured the marchioness. "But M. Faucheux there is, besides all this, the silver plate which belonged to my mother. You know all that heavy plate, which I did not wish to dispose of on account of the recollections attached to it."

"Ah! madam, that would be a capital resource, for example, to persons who are not able, as your ladyship is, to keep all their plate. In those days they did not work so slightly as we do now. They then worked by ingots; but that plate is no longer presentable—only in weight."

"That is all—that is all I want to know; how much does it weigh?"

"Fifty thousand livres, at least. I do not speak of the enormous vases for the sideboard, which alone weigh five thousand livres; that is to say, ten thousand livres for the two."

"One hundred and thirty—" murmured the marchioness. "Are you certain as to these figures, M. Fauchaux?"

"Positive, madam. Besides which there would be no difficulty in weighing them."

"The weight is written in my books," said the marchioness.

"Oh! you are a woman of great order, marchioness."

"Let us now go on to something else," said Madame de Bellière.

And she opened a jewel case.

"I recognize these emeralds," said the jeweller, "for it was I who had them set; they are the finest of the whole court: no, I am wrong, the finest belong to Madame de Chatillon; they came to her from the Messieurs de Guise; but yours, madam, are nearly as fine."

"And they are worth?"—

"With their setting?"

"No; suppose that they were to be sold?"

"I know who would buy them," cried M. Fauchaux.

"That is precisely what I wished; they would be readily sold, then?"

"The whole of your jewelry could be sold, madame; it is well known that you have the richest jewel case in all Paris. You are not one of those women who are always changing. What you buy is of the first quality, and what you once possess, you keep."

"Then, what would be given for these emeralds?"

"One hundred and thirty thousand livres."

The marchioness wrote down on her tablets the sum mentioned by the goldsmith.

"This necklace of rubies?" said she.

"Balass rubies!" exclaimed the jeweller.

"Here they are,"

"They are beautiful! they are superb! I did not know you had these stones, madam."

"At how much do you estimate them?"

"Two hundred thousand livres; the one in the centre is worth a hundred by itself."

"Yes, yes; that is what I thought," replied the marchioness. "The diamonds! now to the diamonds. I have abundance of them, necklaces, rings, ear-rings, drops and tags. Value them M. Fauchaux, value them."

The jeweller took his magnifying glasses, his scales, examined the stones, weighed them and made his calculations in an under tone, as he went on.

"Here are stones," said he, "which have cost you my lady marchioness, an income of forty thousand livres."

"You value them then, at eight hundred thousand livres?"

"About that."

"That is the value I had imagined, but the setting is not estimated in that?"

"Oh! that is always a separate matter, madam; and if I were employed to purchase or to sell them, I should be glad to receive the value of the setting alone, as my commission, and then I should be a gainer of twenty-five thousand livres."

"A very pretty profit."

"Yes, madam, very good, indeed."

"Would you accept that profit on condition of turning these precious stones into ready money?"

"But, madam," cried the jeweller, with alarm, "it is not your intention I suppose, to sell your diamonds."

"Silence! M. Fauchaux; be not uneasy on that score; only give me an answer. You are an honest man; you have supplied our house for thirty years; you knew my father and mother, whom your father and mother worked for. I, therefore speak to you as an old friend. Will you accept the gold of these settings, and place in my hands the value of all these jewels in ready money?"

"Eight hundred thousand livres; why 'tis an enormous sum!"

"I know it."

"Impossible to be found."

"Oh! that cannot be."

"But, madam, only reflect on the noise it will occasion in the world, should you sell all your jewels."

"No one need know of it. You shall have made for me sets of false stones, precisely similar to these. Do not say a word in reply; I will have it so. Sell them in retail; sell only the stones."

"In that way, it could be more readily effected. Monsieur is seeking for jewels, separate stones, for the toilette of his young bride—there is quite a rush for them. He would re-

dily purchase to the amount of six hundred thousand livres, and I am well assured that there are none in Paris so fine as yours."

"And when can you do this?"

"Within three days."

"Well then, the remainder you can sell to private purchasers. For the present write me a contract giving your guaranty. Payment in four days."

"Madam! madam! I conjure you to reflect—You will lose a hundred thousand livres by this haste."

"I would lose two hundred thousand should it be necessary. I must have it all settled to-day. Do you accept my proposal?"

"I accept it, marchioness; but I will not conceal from you that I shall gain five thousand pistoles by it."

"So much the better. And how shall I receive the money?"

"Either in gold or in bills of the bank of Lyons, payable at M. Colbert's office."

"I agree to that," eagerly replied the marchioness.

"Return quickly to your house, and bring me back the amount in bank bills—do you understand me?"

"Yes, madam, but for mercy's sake—"

"Not a word more, M. Fauchaux; by-the-by the plate—I had forgotten that—how much is there of it?"

"Fifty thousand livres."

"That makes up a million," said the marchioness to herself, and then continued aloud. "M. Fauchaux you will take all the gold and silver plate, I shall pretend that I wish to have it changed for patterns more to my taste. Melt it, I say, and let me immediately have the value of it in gold."

"I will do so, marchioness."

"You will have this gold put into a basket, and send it to me by one of your clerks; but in order that my people should not see him, your clerk must wait for me in a carriage."

"You shall have Madame Fauchaux's," said the goldsmith."

"It would perhaps be better that I should get into it at your house."

"Yes, madam."

"Tell three of my servants to carry the plate to your house."

"Yes, madam, I will do so."

The marchioness rang the bell.

"Let M. Fauchaux have the baggage-wagon," said she, to a servant.

M. Fauchaux bowed, left the room, and ordered the servant to follow him

with the wagon as closely as possible, and took care to intimate that the marchioness was about to have her old plate melted to have it remodelled.

In three hours after this, Madame de Bellière went to M. Fauchaux' house, and received from him seven hundred and fifty thousand livres in notes of the bank of Lyons, and two hundred and fifty thousand livres in gold, inclosed in a large casket which a clerk, with much difficulty, carried to Madame Fauchaux' carriage, assisted by the coachman.

For Madame Fauchaux had a coachman. The daughter of a president of the Board of Accounts she had brought a dowry of thirty thousand crowns to her husband. These thirty thousand crowns had fructified during twenty years. The jeweller was worth a million, though a modest man. As to himself he had purchased a venerable carriage, built in 1648, ten years after the birth of the king. This carriage, or rather this rolling house, was the admiration of the whole neighborhood: it was covered with allegorical paintings amid clouds strewn with golden and silver stars.

It was into this rather grotesque equipage that the noble woman climbed, for its height was considerable, the clerk placing himself on the opposite seat and making himself as small as possible for fear that his knees might even graze the dress of the marchioness.

And it was the same clerk who called out to the coachman who was quite proud of driving a marchioness—

"To Saint Mandé."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DOWRY.

M. FAUCHEUX' horses were good steady horses from the province of Perche, having magnificently strong knees and legs that were somewhat swelled. Like the carriage, they had existed in the earlier part of the century.

Therefore, they were not so rapid in their movements as M. Fouquet's horses.

Consequently they took nearly two hours in reaching Saint Mandé.

It may be truly said that their pace was perfectly majestic.

Majesty, as is well known, excludes precipitate motion.

The marchioness ordered the carriage to stop before a well known door, well known, although it had been seen but once, and it will be remembered under circumstances not less painful than those which had now induced her to return to it.

She drew a key from her pocket, and with her own small white hand unlocked the door, which yielded noiselessly to her pressure, and then ordered the clerk to bring the coffer to the first story of the house.

But the coffer was so heavy that the clerk was again obliged to apply to the coachman to assist him.

The coffer was deposited in the small cabinet, or rather boudoir, communicating with the drawing-room, in which we erewhile saw M. Fouquet at the feet of the marchioness.

Madame de Bellière bestowed a louis on the coachman, and a charming smile on the clerk, and then dismissed them both.

She then closed the door, and bolted it, and waited alone and thus barricaded.

No servant appeared in the interior of the house; but every thing was in due order, as if some invisible genius had divined and prepared for the wants of the guest who was expected.

There was a good fire upon the hearth, books on the tables, fresh flowers in the japan vases.

It might have been thought that it was an enchanted house.

The marchioness lighted the candelabras, inhaled the perfume of the flowers, seated herself, and soon was absorbed in a profound reverie.

But this reverie, although of a melancholy nature, still was fraught with sweetness.

In that room she saw a treasure spread out before her. There stood the coffer containing a million, which she had torn from her fortune like the gleaner who tears a blue flower from her fair wreath.

She gave herself up to the most delightful dreams.

She thought, above all, of the means of leaving this large sum with M. Fouquet without his being able to discover from whom the gift proceeded. How to effect this was the first thing that occupied her mind.

But though when reflecting upon it, the thing appeared difficult, she did

not despair of being able to accomplish it. She had only to ring for M. Fouquet, and then hasten away, happier than if, instead of giving him a million, she had found a million for herself.

But since she had entered that room, since she had seen that boudoir, so elegant, so neat, that it might have been thought that a waiting woman had but just brushed away every atom even of dust; when she had seen the drawing room so beautifully arranged that it might have been thought she had chased away the fairies who inhabited it, she asked herself whether the inquiring eyes of those she had thus driven away were they fairies, genii, sprites, or human beings, had not recognized her?

Then Fouquet would know all; and what he did not know he would divine. Fouquet would refuse to accept as a gift that which he might have received as a loan, and thus conducted, her enterprise would fail in its object as in its result.

In order to succeed the step must be undertaken seriously. It was necessary that the superintendent should fully comprehend the gravity of his position in order to submit to the generous caprice of a woman; in order to persuade him it was necessary to employ all the charm of eloquent friendship, and if that did not suffice, all the intoxication of an ardent love, which nothing could be capable of turning aside, in its absolute desire to convince.

And in fact, was not the superintendent known to be a man of excessive delicacy and dignity? Would he allow himself to be burdened with the spoils of a woman's fortune? No; he would resist the attempt—if any voice in the world could overcome that resistance, it was the voice of the woman whom he loved.

Then arose another doubt, one of the most cruel nature; it shot through Madame de Bellière's heart with the pain and the piercing coldness of a poniard.

"Did he really love?"

That volatile mind, that changeable heart, could it resolve to fix itself for one moment, were it even to contemplate an angel.

Was it not with Fouquet, notwithstanding his genius, his known probity, as with those conquerors who shed tears upon the field of battle after they have gained a victory?

"Well! it is that I must discover; it is on that, that I must judge," said

the marchioness, "who knows whether this heart which is so much coveted, be not a vulgar heart, full of alloy, who knows whether this mind, when I shall apply the touchstone to it, will not prove of a trivial and inferior nature?"

"Come! come!" cried she, to herself, "there are too many doubts, too much hesitation, the proof! the proof!"

She looked at the time-piece.

"It is seven o'clock; he must have arrived; it is the hour for signatures. Now then!"

And rising with feverish impatience she walked towards the glass, in which she smiled at herself with the energetic smile of devotedness. She pressed upon the secret spring and then pulled the handle of the bell concealed beneath it.

Then as if exhausted by anticipation by the combat she was thus entering upon, she threw herself upon her knees before a large arm-chair, and covered her face with her trembling hands.

Ten minutes afterwards she heard the creaking of the door spring. The door rolled back upon its invisible hinges.

Fouquet appeared; he was pale, bent down by the weight of bitter thoughts. He did not hasten, he came and that was all.

The pre-occupation must have indeed been powerful to have influenced this man of pleasure, to whom pleasure was every thing, to such a degree as to induce him so slowly to answer such an appeal.

In truth the night had been fruitful in melancholy reflections, and his features usually so nobly impressive were care-worn and haggard, and his eyes were each surrounded with a livid circle.

He was still handsome, still noble, and the melancholy expression of his lips, an expression so rare with him, gave to his countenance a new character which made him appear younger.

Dressed in black and his breast covered profusely with a lace frill which his agitated hands had much rumpled, the superintendent paused apparently in deep thought upon the threshold of that door which he so often had passed in search of the happiness which there awaited him.

That pensive grief, that mournful smile, which had now usurped the place of joyful exultation, produced an indescribable effect upon Madame de

Bellière, who was observing him from some distance.

The eye of a woman can at once read the buoyant pride or anxious suffering of the man she loves; it might be thought that God had given to women on account of their weakness, a quicker perception than he had bestowed on the other sex.

They can conceal their feelings from man, but man cannot conceal his.

The marchioness divined at a sole glance all the unhappiness of the superintendent.

She divined that he had passed a sleepless night.

A whole day passed in disappointment.

From that moment she became strong; she felt that she loved Fouquet more than all the world besides.

She rose and advancing towards him, "You wrote to me this morning," said she to him, "that you were beginning to forget me; that I, whom you had not again seen, had doubtless no longer thought of you. I have come to prove to you that you argue falsely, and that the more surely, for there is one thing in your eyes which I can read."

"And what is that, madam?" inquired Fouquet with astonishment.

"It is that you have never so much loved me as you now do, and in the same manner, you can also see in the step I have taken that I have not forgotten you."

"Oh! marchioness," cried Fouquet a flash of joy illuminating for a moment his noble features; "you! you are an angel, and men have not the right of doubting you. They have only to humble themselves before you and to pray for pardon."

"Then let pardon be granted you." Fouquet would have thrown himself upon his knees.

"No," said the marchioness, sit down here beside me, "oh! I see that a wicked thought has just entered your mind."

"And what induced you to think so, madam?"

"By the smile which has at once spoiled the expression of your countenance. Come, now, tell me, what was it you were thinking of? Speak out, be frank! No secrets between friends."

"Well, then, madam, tell me the occasion of this rigor which has endured three or four months!"

"This rigor?"

"Yes; have you not forbidden me to visit you?"

"Alas! my friend," said Madame de Bellière, with a deep sigh, "because your visit to my house occasioned you a great misfortune; because my house is watched; because the same eyes which then saw you might see you again; because I think it less dangerous for you that I should come here than that you should come to me. In fine, because I think you sufficiently unhappy without my augmenting still farther your misfortune."

Fouquet shuddered.

These words had at once thrown him back upon all the anxieties of the superintendency—he, who for some moments remembered nothing but the hopes of a lover.

"Unfortunate!—I unfortunate?" said he, endeavoring to smile; "but really, marchioness, you will actually make me believe it, with your sorrowful looks. Are those lovely eyes then raised towards me only to pity me? Oh! I await from them a very different sentiment."

"It is not I that am sorrowful, sir; look in that glass—it is you."

"Marchioness, I am rather pale, that is true, but it is from excessive occupation: the king asked me for money yesterday."

"Yes, I know that; four millions."

"You know that!" exclaimed Fouquet with surprise; "and how can you possibly have heard it? Why, it was at the card-party, after the queens had retired, and in presence of one person only, that the king—"

"You see that I do know it, and that is sufficient, is it not? Well! go on, my friend, this money which the king has asked of you—"

"You will readily conceive, marchioness, that it was necessary to procure it, then to have it counted, and then to have it registered; all this takes much time. Since the death of M. de Mazarin, there is somewhat of trouble and disorder in the service of the finance department. My administration is overloaded with work, and that is why I have been up all night."

"So that you have the amount?" inquired the marchioness, with some uneasiness.

"It would be a pretty thing, truly," replied Fouquet, "if a superintendent of finance had not four poor millions in his coffers."

"Yes, I believe you have them, or that you will have them."

"What mean you by 'I will have them?'"

"It is not long since that he asked you for two?"

"On the contrary, marchioness, it seems to me an age; but do not let us say another word on money matters, I beg of you."

"On the contrary, let us speak of them, my friend."

"Oh!"

"Listen to me; I came here but for that."

"But what then can you mean?" inquired Fouquet, whose eyes expressed an agitated curiosity.

"Tell me, sir, is the superintendency a post for life?"

"Marchioness!"

"You have seen that I have answered you, and frankly, too."

"Marchioness, you surprise me; you speak to me as if you were a partner in my affairs."

"It is perfectly natural; I wish to place money in your hands, and, very properly, I wish to ascertain if you are safe."

"In truth, marchioness, you confound me, and I no longer know what your intention can be."

"Seriously, my dear Monsieur Fouquet, I have some funds which I know not how to place. I am tired of purchasing estates, and I wish to request some friend to lay out my money advantageously."

"But there can be no hurry to do this, I imagine," observed Fouquet.

"On the contrary, there is need of haste, and great need too."

"Well, then, we will talk of it by and by."

"No, no, not by and by, for my money is there."

The marchioness directed the attention of the superintendent to the coffer, opened it, showed to him the parcels of bank-notes and the gold.

Fouquet had risen at the same instant with Madame de Bellière. He remained pensive for a moment, then suddenly starting back, he became pale, and fell into a chair hiding his face with both his hands.

"Oh! marchioness! marchioness!" murmured he.

"Well?"

"What opinion can you then have formed of me that you should make me such an offer?"

"Of you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"What do you then think of it, yourself? Come, now, let us see."

"This money, you have brought to me for myself;—you have brought it because you know that I am embarrassed. Oh! do not deny it. I divine it all. Do I not know your heart?"

"Well then, since you know my heart, you see that it is my heart I am offering to you."

"I have then judged rightly!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Oh! madam, in truth I have never given you the right thing to insult me."

"Insult you!" cried she, turning pale. "Oh! strange excess of human delicacy! You have told me that you loved me! In the name of that love you have asked me to sacrifice my reputation, my honor! And when I offer you this vile dross, you refuse me."

"Marchioness! marchioness! you are at liberty to retain that which you call your reputation, your honor. Allow me the liberty of retaining mine. Allow me to ruin myself, to succumb beneath the burden of hatreds which environ me, beneath the burden even of my own remorse; but in the name of Heaven, marchioness, do not crush me with this last blow."

"Just now you failed in judgment, Monsieur Fouquet," said she.

"That is possible, madam."

"And now you show yourself to be wanting in heart."

Fouquet pressed his hand to his palpitating breast.

"Overwhelm me as you will, madam, I have nothing to reply."

"I have offered you my friendship, Monsieur Fouquet."

"True, madam, but you limited yourself to that."

"Is what I am doing the action of a friend?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And you refuse this proof of my friendship?"

"I do refuse it."

"Look at me, Monsieur Fouquet."

The eyes of the marchioness were altogether dazzling.

"I offer you my love."

"Oh! madam," cried Fouquet.

"I love you, do you hear, have long loved you; women, like men, have their false delicacy. For a long time I have loved you, but I would not avow it to you."

"Oh!" cried Fouquet, clasping his hands.

"Well then! I now avow it. You have sued for my love on your knees, and I refused it to you. I was then blinded as you were; but now, I now offer my love to you."

"Yes, your love, but your love only."

"My love, myself, my life! all! all! all!"

"Oh! gracious Heaven!" exclaimed the enraptured Fouquet.

"Will you accept my love?"

"Oh! you now overwhelm me with the weight of happiness."

"Will you be happy—tell me—will you be happy if I am yours, yours only?"

"Oh! 'tis supreme felicity."

"But if I sacrifice to you a prejudice you must in your turn sacrifice a scruple."

"Madam, madam, do not thus tempt me."

"My friend, my friend, do not refuse me!"

"Oh! think for a moment on that you are proposing."

"Fouquet, one word—say, no—and instantly I will open that door."

She pointed to the one which led to the street.

"And you shall never see me more, Another word—say, yes, and I will follow you where you will with my eyes closed, without defence, without refusal, without remorse."

"Elise—Elise—but that coffer."

"It is my dower."

"It is your ruin!" exclaimed Fouquet, turning over the notes and gold; "there must be a million there—"

"Precisely—my jewels, which will no longer be of use to me if you do not love me: and which will be of no more use to me if you love me as I do you."

"Oh! this is too much! this is too much!" cried Fouquet! "I yield, I yield! were it but to consecrate such devotedness. I accept the dowry."

"And here is the wife," said the marchioness, throwing herself into his arms.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TERRITORY OF HEAVEN.

DURING this time Buckingham and de Wardes were travelling on towards

Calais in perfect harmony and like good companions.

Buckingham had hastened his farewell visits in such a manner that the greater part of them were left unpaid.

The visits to Monsieur and Madame, to the young queen, and to the queen-dowager, were made collectively.

This had been arranged by the queen-mother, who thus spared him the pain of any farther private conversation with Monsieur, and the danger of again seeing Madame alone.

Buckingham had embraced Guiche and Raoul; he assured the former of his great consideration, and the latter of his constant friendship, which should surmount all obstacles, and which could not be shaken by either time or distance.

The baggage wagons had been sent on before the duke left Paris, accompanied by all his household.

De Wardes, completely irritated at being, as it were, towed away from Paris by an Englishman, had endeavored by all the means his subtle mind could suggest, to escape from such a chain, but he was compelled to endure the penalty which his malignant temper and sarcastic spirit had entailed upon him.

Those to whom he could have explained his position, as men of wit, would have rallied him on the superiority of the duke.

Others of a more sober temperament, but men of judgment, would have alleged the king's orders, which forbade duelling.

Others, and these were far the most numerous class, who from charity, or from national pride, would have lent him their assistance, would not have cared to run the risk of disgrace, and would most probably have informed the authorities of a departure which might degenerate into a petty massacre.

The result of all this was, that after well weighing these considerations, de Wardes packed up his portmanteau, ordered his horses, and followed by a servant, took the road to the gate where he was to meet Buckingham's carriage. The duke received his adversary with as much cordiality as if he had been his most amiable acquaintance, drew himself on one side to allow him to take his seat, offered him some comfits, and spread over his knees a sable cloak which had been thrown on the fore seat of the carriage.

And then they entered into conversation,

Of the court, without speaking of Madame.

Of Monsieur, without speaking of his wife.

Of the king, without speaking of his sister-in-law.

Of the queen-mother, without speaking of her daughter-in-law.

Of the king of England, without speaking of his sister.

Of the love affairs of each of the travellers, without mentioning any dangerous name.

And thus the journey, which was performed by easy stages, was perfectly delightful.

Thus Buckingham who was a Frenchman as to wit and education, was delighted at having so well chosen his companion.

Delicious repasts which were enjoyed with the zest of real connoisseurs; trying of horses in the lovely meadows by which the road was bounded; hare hunting (for Buckingham had his harriers with him), such was the mode in which they passed their time.

The duke somewhat resembled our lovely river Seine, which a thousand times embraces France in its amorous meanderings before it can make up its mind to cast itself into the ocean.

But in leaving France, it was above all the new French woman whom he had accompanied to Paris that Buckingham regretted; he conceived not a thought which was not a recollection, and consequently a regret.

And therefore as it would sometime happen, despite his empire over himself, that he would be completely absorbed by these better fancies, de Wardes would leave him altogether to his reveries.

This delicacy would certainly have touched Buckingham, and changed his feeling with regard to de Wardes, had the latter, even while he remained thus silent, had less malignant eyes, and a less false smile.

But hatred, by instinct, is inflexible; nothing can extinguish it. A few ashes may smother it for a moment, but beneath these ashes it burns as furiously as ever.

After having exhausted every description of amusement that presented itself to them on the road, they at length arrived at Calais.

It was towards the close of the sixth day.

The previous day the duke's servants had gone on before, and had hired a

bark. This bark was intended to carry off to a small yacht, which was cruising within sight, making short tacks, or occasionally lying to at two or three gun shots from the jetty, the carriage and baggage of the duke.

The horses had been already shipped; they had been hoisted from the bark on to the deck of the yacht, in stalls made expressly, and wadded in such a manner that their limbs, even in their most violent struggles, whether from terror or impatience, could not be injured, or their fine coats even grazed.

Eight of these stalls placed in juxtaposition completely filled the hold of the yacht. It is well known that horses, during a short voyage, will not eat, and seem to tremble even at the sight of their most favorite food.

By degrees the whole of the duke's equipages were conveyed on board the yacht, and then his servants came to announce to him that every thing was ready, and that when he wished to go on board with the French gentleman, they waited only for them.

For no one imagined that the French gentleman had any thing to regulate with his Grace, excepting matters of a friendly nature.

Buckingham sent word to the captain of the yacht to remain close in shore; but as the sea was smooth, and the weather promising a most delightful sunset, he thought of going on board only at nightfall, and would take advantage of the fine evening to walk upon the beach.

He added, moreover, that being in excellent company he was not at all anxious to hurry his departure.

And saying this, he pointed out to the persons who surrounded him the magnificent spectacle of the heavens, empurpled at the horizon, and veiled with large fleecy clouds, which reached from the sun's disk high as the zenith, assuming the form of a chain of mountains heaped one upon the other.

All this amphitheatre was at the base tinged with a blood-red color, softening off into lines of opal and mother of pearl as by degrees the gazer's eyes rose towards the summit. The sea was also tinged by the reflection of these same colors, and on the top of each blue wave a luminous point danced for a moment, brilliant as a ruby exposed to the reflection of a lamp.

The spectacle, in fact, was truly worthy of being admired.

A crowd of curious persons followed

the servants in their magnificent liveries bedizened with gold lace, among whom, seeing the intendant and the secretary of the duke, they imagined they were the duke himself and his friend.

As to Buckingham, who was plainly dressed in a gray satin waistcoat and a violet colored velvet doublet, his hat pulled down over his eyes, wearing no orders nor embroidery, he was not more remarked than de Wardes, who was dressed in plain black as a lawyer.

The duke's servants had been ordered to remain in a boat near the mole, and to watch the embarkation of their master, without approaching him until either he or his friend should call them.

"Whatever they might see," he had added, laying a peculiar stress upon these words, that they might be perfectly comprehended.

After walking some little time upon the beach, Buckingham said to de Wardes,

"I think, sir, that it will now be necessary to take leave of each other. You see that the tide is coming in; in ten minutes, it will have so thoroughly moistened the sand on which we stand, that our footing will be insecure."

"My lord, I am at your command, but—"

"But we are still on the king's territory, are we not?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well then, come. There is yonder a sort of island surrounded by a flake of foam: the flake increases and the island is disappearing little by little. That island is undoubtedly the property of heaven, and it is not on the king's maps. Do you see it?"

"I see it. We cannot even now reach it without wetting our feet."

"That is true; but it forms a tolerable eminence, and the tide, though rising does not threaten its summit. From this I conclude that we should be perfectly at our ease there. What think you of it?"

"I should be well any where, my lord, where my sword can have the honor of meeting yours."

"Let us go there, then. I am much chagrined at being compelled to make you wet your feet, M. de Wardes, but it is, I believe, necessary that you should be able to tell the king, that you did not fight upon his majesty's territory. It is perhaps somewhat subtle, but since Port Royal you only wade through subtleties. Oh! let us not

complain of that, for it has much added to your national wit—in which you are superior to all other people. If you are so pleased, we will hasten there, for the tide is running very quickly, and night is closing in."

"If I do not walk faster, it is because I do not wish to precede your grace. Are your feet dry, my lord duke?"

"Yes, up to this time. Look yonder. There are my fellows who are afraid we are going to drown ourselves, and who are approaching with the boat. Only see how they are dancing on the tops of the waves. It is very curious; but it makes me sea sick. Will you allow me to turn my back to them?"

"You will observe, my lord, that by turning your back to them, the sun will be in your face."

"Oh! it is but weak at this late hour, and will soon have disappeared; you need not be uneasy on that score."

"As you will, my lord; what I said was from mere delicacy."

"I know it, Monsieur de Wardes, and duly appreciate your observation. Shall we take off our doublets?"

"Decide that as you will, my lord."

"It would be more convenient."

"Then, I am quite ready."

"Tell me, and without ceremony, Monsieur de Wardes, whether you feel yourself ill at ease upon this humid sand, or if you think yourself still too much on the French territory? We can fight in England or on board my yacht."

"We are very well here, my lord, I would merely have the honor to observe to your lordship that the tide is rising fast, and we shall scarcely have time—"

Buckingham made an assenting sign, took off his doublet and threw it on the sand.

De Wardes did the same.

Their two bodies, white as two phantoms to the persons who were looking at them from the beach, stood out in bold relief from the dark violet clouds formed on the horizon.

"In good faith, my lord duke, we can neither of us retreat," said de Wardes. "Do you not feel how our feet sink into the sand?"

"Mine are buried in it," replied the duke, "up to my ankles; and now the water is gaining fast upon us."

"I feel it also. Whenever it may please you my lord duke."

De Wardes drew his sword.

The duke also drew his.

"Monsieur de Wardes," then said

Buckingham, "a last word if you please. I fight with you because I do not like you, because you have torn my heart by rallying a passion which I entertain, which I now avow, and for which I should think it a happiness to die. You are a malignant man, Monsieur de Wardes, and I shall use all my endeavors to kill you; for I feel, that should you not die on this occasion, you will eventually do much injury to my friends. And this is what I had to tell you, Monsieur de Wardes."

And Buckingham saluted with his sword.

"And I, my lord," said de Wardes, "this is what I have to reply to you. I did not hate you, but now that you have divined my character, I do hate you, and will do all I can to kill you."

And de Wardes saluted Buckingham.

At the same instant their swords crossed.

They were both skilful swordsmen; the first passes were made without result.

Night had come on rapidly; it was so dark that they attacked and parried by instinct, their swords sought each other, touched and seemed to guess each other's movements.

Suddenly de Wardes felt that his sword was stopped; he had just wounded Buckingham in the shoulder.

The duke lowered the point of his weapon.

"Ah!" cried he.

"You are hit, are you not, my lord?" cried de Wardes, drawing back two paces.

"Yes, sir, but slightly."

"You have, however, dropped your guard."

"It was the first effect produced by the sensation of the cold iron, but that is past. Let us recommence, sir, if you please."

And disengaging with a sinistrous crash the duke wounded the marquis in the chest.

"You are also hit," said he.

"No," replied de Wardes, remaining firm at his post.

"I beg your pardon," retorted Buckingham, "but seeing your shirt covered with blood."

"Then," cried de Wardes, furiously, then take care of yourself.

And making a desperate lunge his sword passed through Buckingham's arm some way below the elbow. The sword had passed between the two bones.

Buckingham feeling that his right arm was paralyzed, snatched at his sword, which was near falling, with his left hand, and before de Wardes had time to recover his guard, he ran him through the breast.

De Wardes staggered, his knees bent beneath him, and letting go his sword which was still sticking firmly in the duke's arm, he fell into the water which was then tinted with a more real color than that which it received from the clouds.

De Wardes was not dead, he felt the frightful danger which then threatened him, the tide was rising more rapidly every moment.

The duke also felt the danger. With a violent effort and a cry of extreme pain he tore the sword from his arm, and turning towards de Wardes,

"You are not dead, marquis?" said he.

"No," replied de Wardes, his utterance almost stifled by the blood which was rising from his chest to his throat, "but little short of it."

"Well! let us see what can be done. Do you think you can walk?"

And Buckingham raised him on his knee.

"Impossible!" replied de Wardes, and then falling back, "call your people," he continued, "or I shall be drowned."

"Hiloo! Hiloo! you in the boat there," cried Buckingham, "come here instantly, row stoutly."

The men plied their oars vigorously. But the sea was rising faster than the boat could be impelled.

Buckingham saw a wave rolling in which would have covered de Wardes, and with his left arm, which was unwounded, he caught him up.

The wave reached nearly to his waist but he stood firm.

The duke immediately hastened with his burden towards the beach; but he had scarcely advanced ten paces when a second wave, running higher, more threatening, more furious than the first struck him, and as it broke upon his shoulders, threw him down and overwhelmed them both.

Then when it retired it left the duke and de Wardes both lying on the sand.

De Wardes had fainted.

At that moment four of the duke's sailors, seeing their dangerous position, threw themselves into the sea and in a few seconds were at the duke's side.

Great was their horror when they

perceived their master, the blood streaming from him as by degrees the water, with which he had been covered receded towards his knees and feet. They caught him up and would have carried him to the boat.

"No! no! cried the duke, "to the shore! carry the marquis to the shore!"

"Death! death, to the Frenchman," cried the Englishmen in threatening tones.

"Rascals! wretches!" cried the duke with a violent gesture which sprinkled them with his blood, "obey, at once, you scoundrels; carry M. de Wardes to the beach—to the beach instantly. First, place M. de Wardes in safety or I will hang you all."

During this time the boat had come close up, the secretary and the indent had in their turn jumped into the sea, and hastened to the marquis.

He gave no signs of life.

"I recommend that gentleman, on your lives be careful of him. Carry M. de Wardes to the shore! to the shore!"

They took him up in their arms and carried him high upon the dry sand, where the tide never reached.

Some lookers on together with five or six fishermen had assembled upon the beach, attracted by the singular spectacle of two men fighting, with the water up to their knees.

The fishermen, seeing a group of men coming towards them, carrying a wounded person, advanced hurriedly to meet them, and going knee deep into the sea.

The Englishmen delivered the wounded man to their care at the moment that the latter began to open his eyes.

The salt water and the sand had penetrated into his wounds, and, together, caused him the most agonizing suffering.

The duke's secretary took from his pocket a purse full of gold, and confiding it to the most respectable looking person in the group, said—

"This is from my master, the Duke of Buckingham, in order that every possible care should be taken of the Marquis de Wardes."

And he then returned, followed by all his party, to the boat, which Buckingham had succeeded in reaching with great difficulty; but this was only after seeing that de Wardes was out of the reach of danger.

The sea was already high; the doublets and silk sashes had been

carried away by the sea, as were several hats. By a singular chance the duke's doublet had been cast upon the shore.

The fishermen wrapped up de Wardes in this doublet, conceiving it to be his, and then carried him in their arms towards the town.

CHAPTER XXV.

TRIPLE LOVE.

SINCE the departure of Buckingham Guiche imagined that the whole universe was his sole and undivided possession.

Monsieur, who had no longer the slightest reason for jealousy, and who moreover allowed himself to be completely monopolized by the Chevalier de Lorraine, granted to all his household as much liberty as the most exacting could have desired.

On his side the king, who had evinced much taste for the society of Madame, had imagined pleasure after pleasure in order to render the sojourn at Paris as gay as possible. So that not a day passed over without some festival at the Palais Royal, or some reception in Monsieur's apartments.

The king was having Fontainebleau arranged for the reception of the court, and every one was making interest to be included in the party.

Madame was leading a most busy life; her pen and her tongue were not idle for a moment.

Her conversations with Guiche by degrees assumed that interest which always denotes the prelude to a great passion.

When eyes become languishing even on the discussion of the color of a silk, when an hour is passed in analyzing the merits and the perfume of a scented bag or a flower, that species of conversation may be carried on in words which all the world may hear; but there are sighs and gestures which all the world cannot perceive.

When Madame had conversed abundantly with M. de Guiche, she would converse with the king, who regularly visited her every day. They played, they made verses, they chose emblems and devices.

The spring was not only the spring-time of nature, it was the youth of a

whole people, of which this court was the head.

The king was handsome, young, and more gallant than all the rest of the court. He amorously loved all women, even the queen, his wife.

Only that this great king was the most timid or the most reserved man of the whole kingdom, so much so that he did not acknowledge his feelings even to himself.

This reserve restrained him within the limits of mere politeness, and no woman could boast of any preference over another.

They might have foreseen that the day on which he should declare himself would be the dawning of a new sovereignty; but he did not declare himself.

M. de Guiche took advantage of this to make himself King of the court of Love.

It had been said that he was on good terms with Mademoiselle de Montalais, and very assiduous with Mademoiselle de Chatillon; now, he was no longer even civil to any lady of the court. He had neither eyes nor ears for any but for one.

Therefore he had insensibly resumed his post in the household of Monsieur, who was fond of him, and retained him with him as much as possible.

Being naturally reserved, he had absented himself too frequently before the arrival of Madame; but since her arrival he did not absent himself so frequently as he ought.

Which being remarked by all the world, and more particularly by the evil genius of the house, the Chevalier de Lorraine, for whom Monsieur evinced a lively attachment, because he was of a joyous disposition, even when venting his malice, and moreover was never deficient in ideas to employ time amusingly.

The Chevalier de Lorraine, we say, seeing that Guiche threatened to supplant him, had recourse to the grand expedient. He disappeared, leaving Monsieur much discontented.

The first day after his disappearance Monsieur scarcely inquired after him, for de Guiche was there, and, saving the time occupied in his conversations with Madame, he courageously consecrated the hours of the day and night to the prince.

But the second day Monsieur, not finding any one near him, inquired what had become of the chevalier.

He was told that no one knew.

Guiche, after having spent his morning in selecting embroideries and fringes with Madame, went to console the prince. But after dinner there were tulips and amethysts to be valued, and Guiche returned to the cabinet of Madame.

Monsieur remained alone, it was his hour for dressing for the evening, and he felt himself the most unfortunate of men; he again inquired if any thing had been heard of the chevalier.

"No one can tell where to find the chevalier," was the reply given to the prince.

Monsieur, not knowing how to rid himself of the ennui which overpowered him, hastened, as he was, in his dressing-gown, but with his hair full dressed, to Madame's apartments.

There he found a great number of persons, who were laughing and whispering in every corner of the room. Here was a group of women surrounding a man amid stifled shouts of laughter; there Manicamp and Malicorne being teased by Mademoiselle Montalais and Mademoiselle Tonnyay Charente and two other laughing maids of honor.

Farther on Madame, seated upon cushions, de Guiche on his knees before her, and spreading out a handful of large pearls, among which the white slender fingers of the princess were pointing out those which pleased her most.

In another corner was a guitar player, who was singing Spanish *seguedillas*, of which Madame had become enthusiastically fond since she had heard the young queen sing them with a certain degree of melancholy; only with this difference, that the verses which the Spanish princess sung with tearful eyes, the English one hummed with a smile which displayed her pearl-like teeth.

The cabinet thus inhabited was the most perfect picture of smiling happiness.

On entering it, Monsieur was so much struck at seeing so many people thus amusing themselves without him, and felt so jealous on the subject, that he could not avoid expressing his annoyance like a pouting child.

"How!" he exclaimed, "you are all diverting yourselves here, while I am wearying myself alone."

His voice was like the thunder-clap which at once silences the sweet warbling of the birds beneath the foliage, all at once became mute.

Guiche was on his feet in a moment. Malicorne made himself as small as possible behind Mademoiselle de Montalais' petticoats.

Manicamp drew himself up, and assumed his most ceremonious air.

The guitar player thrust his guitar under a table, and drew the cover over it in order to conceal it from the prince's eyes.

Madame was the only one that did not stir: but smiling at her husband replied to him:

"Is not this your hour for dressing?"

"And which is selected, it appears, for your amusements," grumbled the prince.

These untoward words were the signal of a general retreat. The women fled like a flock of frightened birds; the guitar player vanished like a shadow. Malicorne, still protected by Montalais, who stretched out her gown as widely as possible, glided behind some tapestry. As to Manicamp, he advanced in support of Guiche, who naturally remained standing near Madame, and both of them bravely sustained the shock, together with the princess.

The count was but too happy to feel angry with the husband; but Monsieur was angry with his wife.

He wished to find some pretext for a quarrel. He sought for one, and the precipitate departure of the throng, so joyous before he made his appearance, and whom his presence had so much disturbed, appeared to him a very favorable one.

"Why is it that every one flies thus on seeing me?" said he, in a surly tone.

Madame coldly replied that every time the master of a house appeared the family withdrew from respect.

And while saying these words, she made up so droll and ludicrous a face that Guiche and Manicamp could not restrain themselves. They both burst out in a loud laugh. Madame joined them in it; and the fit having gained Monsieur himself, he was compelled to sit down or otherwise would have lost too much of his gravity.

At length he ceased laughing; but his anger was only increased by it. He was even more furious at having allowed himself to laugh than at having seen the others laugh.

He looked at Manicamp with great glaring eyes, not daring to evince his anger towards the Count de Guiche.

But on a gesture which he made

with rather too much of vexation, Maucamp and Guiche withdrew.

So that Madame, left alone with Monsieur, sorrowfully gathered up her pearls. She no longer laughed, and spoke still less.

"I am very happy to perceive that I am treated as a stranger in your apartments, madam."

And he left the room exasperated.

On his way he met Montalais who was watching in the ante-chamber.

"It is delightful to see you all," said the prince to her; "but from the door."

Montalais made him a most profound courtesy.

"I do not precisely understand," she replied, "what your royal highness has done me the honor to say to me."

"I say, mademoiselle, that when you are all laughing in Madame's apartments, he is an unwelcome guest that does not remain outside the door."

"Your royal highness doubtless does not in this speak or think of yourself?"

"On the contrary, mademoiselle, it is of myself I am speaking; it is of myself I am thinking. I have no reason to feel much flattered at the way in which I am received here. How, on a day when there is music and grand reception in Madame's apartments, and at a moment when I also wish for amusement, I no sooner present myself than every one flies at my approach? Tell me, if you please, am I then so terrible that every one shuns me? Something wrong is going forward, then, when I am absent."

"Why," replied Montalais, "we were not doing more to-day than we do every other day."

"What! do you laugh every day as heartily as that?"

"Why yes, your highness."

"What, every day you form yourselves into groups such as I have just now seen?"

"Precisely so, my lord."

"And music every day?"

"Monsieur, the guitar was introduced to-day for the first time; but when we have no guitar we have violins and flutes. Women cannot but be dull without music."

"The deuse! and the men?"

"What men, monseigneur?"

"Monsieur de Guiche, Monsieur de Maucamp, and the others, Monsieur"—

"All belonging to the household, monseigneur."

"Yes, yes; you are right, mademoiselle."

And the prince returned to his own apartments, and threw himself into his largest arm-chair, without even looking at a mirror.

"Where can the chevalier be?" said he.

There was a servant standing near the prince, who heard this question.

"No one knows, monseigneur."

"Again that same answer!—the first of you who shall reply to me, 'I do not know,' I will instantly discharge."

On hearing this every one fled from Monsieur's apartment, as they had done from that of Madame.

Then the prince flew into an indescribable passion. He gave a kick to a chiffonier, which fell to the ground, and broke into a thousand pieces.

And then, with the greatest coolness, he went into the gallery, knocked an enamel vase, a porphyry water jug, and a bronze candelabras one over the other. All this made a most frightful noise; in a few seconds all his attendants were at the doors.

"What does monseigneur desire?" inquired the captain of the guards, who timidly ventured to address him.

"I am merely getting up some music for myself," replied the prince, grinding his teeth.

The captain of the guards immediately sent for his royal highness's physician.

But before the physician came in Malicorne, who said to the prince:

"Monseigneur, the Chevalier de Lorraine is close behind me."

The duke looked at Malicorne and smiled.

The chevalier soon made his appearance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MONSIEUR DE LORRAINE'S JEALOUSY.

THE Duke of Orleans gave a shout of satisfaction on perceiving the Chevalier de Lorraine.

"Oh! this is fortunate," said he, "by what chance, chevalier, do I again see you? I had been told that you had altogether disappeared."

"It was so, monseigneur."

"Some caprice."

"Caprice! Could I be capricious with regard to your royal highness? My respect—"

"Talk not of respect, for that you

fail in every day. I absolve you. Why did you go away?"

"Because I was perfectly useless to your highness."

"Explain yourself."

"Monseigneur has persons about him who are much more amusing than I can ever be, I do not feel myself of sufficient merit to contend with them. I therefore withdraw."

"All this reserve is perfect nonsense. Who are the persons against whom you cannot contend? Guiche?"

"I name no one."

"That is absurd. Guiche annoys you."

"I do not say that, monseigneur; do not compel me to speak; you know well that Guiche is one of our best friends."

"Who is it, then?"

"I beg of you, monseigneur, let us not say another word on the subject, I entreat you—"

The chevalier well knew that curiosity is only the more excited, as is thirst, by placing the beverage at a distance, by deferring to allay.

"No, I insist on knowing why it was you disappeared."

"Well then, I will tell you; but you must not take it ill of me."

"Speak."

"I perceived that I was in the way."

"Of whom?"

"Of Madame."

"And how so?" said the duke, astonished.

"It is plain enough; Madame perhaps is jealous of the attachment you are pleased to have for me."

"And she has given evidence of this feeling?"

"Monseigneur, Madame never addresses a word to me, and particularly since a certain time."

"What time?"

"Since M. de Guiche became more agreeable to her than myself. She receives him at all hours."

The duke colored.

"At all hours!—what is the meaning of that expression, chevalier?" said he, severely.

"You see now, monseigneur, that I have displeased you. I was sure it would be so."

"You do not displease me, but you say things rather violently. In what respect does Madame prefer Guiche to you?"

"I will not say another word," said the chevalier, bowing very ceremoniously

"On the contrary, it is my intention that you should speak. If you withdraw on that account you must be very jealous?"

"One must be jealous when one loves, monseigneur; is not your highness jealous of Madame; and should your highness see some one always near Madame, and that some one favorably treated, would you not be displeased? We love our friends as we do our mistresses. Your royal highness has sometimes done me the high honor to call me your friend."

"Yes, but there again you have let slip an equivocal word; chevalier, you are unfortunate in your choice of terms."

"What word was that, your highness?"

"You used the expression, *favorably treated*. What do you mean by *favorably*?"

"Nothing can be plainer, monseigneur," replied the chevalier, with great seeming good nature. "Thus, for instance, when a husband observes that his wife always calls such and such a man to be near her person; when that man is always near her bed-side or riding beside her carriage door; when there is always a small place for that man's foot within the circumference of the lady's gown; when they are seen talking together on all occasions; when the bouquet of the lady is always of the same colors as the ribands of the gentleman; when there is music in the private apartments, and suppers by the bedside; when on the husband's suddenly appearing, every body remains perfectly mute; when the husband all at once perceives that his most assiduous, most tender companion, is a man who but a week before appeared the least attached to him—why then—"

"Then—conclude."

"Why, then I say, monseigneur, a man may be jealous, but all these details have nothing to do with the question, they are all foreign to it."

The duke was evidently much moved and agitated.

"But you do not tell me," said he at length, "you do not tell me why you absented yourself; you said just now that it was because you were afraid of being in the way, you added even that you had remarked an inclination on the part of Madame for M. de Guiche's society."

"Oh! monseigneur, I did not say that."

"But indeed you did."

"But if I did say so, I considered it as perfectly innocent."

"In short you considered something."

"You embarrass me, monseigneur."

"That matters not; speak out. If you speak the truth, why should you be embarrassed?"

"I always speak the truth, monseigneur, but I also always hesitate when I have to repeat that which is said by others."

"Ah! you repeat—it seems then that some one else has observed."

"I acknowledge that I have been told something—"

"And by whom?"

The chevalier assumed an almost angry air.

"Monseigneur," said he, "you are subjecting me to a close interrogation, you treat me as if I were a criminal at the bar of justice. There are rumors which sometimes reach a gentleman's ears, but they pass by without his heeding them. Your highness wishes me to give these rumors the importance of a positive event—"

"In short," cried the duke with much vexation, "it is a positive fact that you withdrew on account of these rumors."

"I cannot but speak the truth; I was spoken to as to the assiduous attention paid by M. de Guiche to Madame; nothing more; an innocent pleasure, I repeat and moreover perfectly permissible. Do not therefore be unjust, monseigneur, and push things to an excess. It is no concern of yours."

"How, no concern of mine that people should speak of de Guiche's assiduities towards Madame?"

"No, monseigneur, no; and what I have said to you, I would say to Guiche himself, so completely innocent do I think the court he pays to Madame, but for one consideration which you will readily comprehend. I am afraid of being considered jealous of favor, when I am only jealous of friendship. I know your foible, I know that when you like a person you are exclusive in your liking. Now, you love Madame, and who could do otherwise than love her? Follow attentively the circle I am pursuing; Madame has distinguished the handsomest and most attractive among your friends; she will so much influence you in his favor that you will neglect every other. Your disdain would absolutely kill me; it is

already enough to be subjected to that of Madame. I have therefore, monseigneur, made up my mind to cede my place to the favorite whose happiness I envy, though I profess towards him the sincerest friendship and the sincerest admiration. Tell me now, have you any thing to urge against this reasoning? Is it not that of a man of honor? Is not my conduct that of a worthy friend? You who have so harshly questioned me, should at least reply."

The duke had thrown himself into a chair, his face was buried in both his hands, with which he had much deranged his head-dress.

After a silence which had continued long enough to convince the chevalier of the effect his oratorical combinations had produced, the prince raised his head.

"Come now," said he, "be frank."

"As I always am."

"Good. You know that we had already remarked something with regard to that hair-brained Duke of Buckingham?"

"Oh! monseigneur, do not accuse Madame, or I will instantly take my leave of you. What! do you give yourself up to these ideas. What! can you suspect—"

"No, no, chevalier, I do not suspect Madame. But in short—I see—I compare—"

"Buckingham was a madman!"

"A madman with regard to whom you completely opened my eyes."

"No, no!" eagerly cried the chevalier, "it was not I who opened your eyes; it was Guiche—oh! do not let us confuse matters."

And he laughed with that ringing and sardonic laugh which resembles the hissing of a serpent.

"Yes, yes—you did say some few words; but Guiche was the most jealous of the two."

"And very justly," continued the Chevalier de Lorraine in the same tone, "he was combating for the altar and the household gods—"

"What say you?" cried the duke, imperiously, for he was disgusted by this perfidious jest.

"Undoubtedly. Is not Monsieur de Guiche the first gentleman of your household?"

"In short," replied the duke somewhat more calm, "this passion of the Duke of Buckingham had been remarked?"

"Indubitably."

"Well then! is it said that that of M. de Guiche is also remarked?"

"Why, monseigneur, you are falling back again into the same error; no one says that M. de Guiche has any passion."

"'Tis well! 'tis well!"

"You see, monseigneur, that it would be much better, a thousand times better to leave me in my retirement, than for you to forge suspicions from my scruples, which Madame would consider as positive crimes, and with good reason."

"And what would you do—you?"

"That which would be most reasonable."

"And that would be?"

"Not to pay the slightest attention to the association of these new epicureans, and in this way all those rumors would cease."

"I will see. I will reflect upon it."

"Oh! you have plenty of time, the danger is not so great, and besides there is no question of either danger or passion; the only question in reality is that I was afraid of your friendship for me becoming less ardent. But since you have so graciously assured me of its continuance, all these gloomy ideas are at once dispelled."

The duke shook his head, as if he meant to say, "If you have no gloomy ideas I have them in abundance."

But the dinner hour had arrived, and Monsieur sent to let Madame know that it was ready. A reply was sent that Madame could not attend the summons and that she would dine in her own room.

"It is no fault of mine," said the duke; "this morning I happened to stumble in while they were all occupied with their music; I showed my jealousy and she is now in the pouts."

"And we shall dine alone," said the chevalier with a sigh. "I regret Guiche's absence."

"Oh! Guiche will not remain long in the sulks; he has a good temper."

"Monseigneur," said the count suddenly, "a good idea has just presented itself; in our conversation just now, I may have soured your highness against him, and have given you some unpleasant thoughts. It therefore is only proper that I should be a mediator—I will go and look for Guiche and bring him back with me."

"Ah! chevalier, you are a good soul."

"You say that, as if you were surprised."

"The deuse! you are not so tender every day."

"Be it so; but I know how to repair a wrong I have committed—you must acknowledge that."

"I do acknowledge it."

"Your highness will be so gracious as to wait here for a few minutes."

"Willingly—go—In the mean time I will try on my new clothes for Fontainebleau."

As soon as the chevalier left the room he sent for all his servants, to whom he gave various orders. They went off in different directions, but the chevalier retained his valet de chambre.

"Find out," said he, "and find out immediately whether Monsieur de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments. Tell me, how can you discover that?"

"Very easily, sir; I will ask M. Malicorne, who will know it from Mademoiselle de Montalais. However, I must tell you at once that it will be in vain, for all M. de Guiche's servants have left the palace; and their master must have gone with them."

"Nevertheless, inquire."

Ten minutes had not elapsed when the valet de chambre returned. He drew his master aside into the back staircase and took him into a small room the window of which opened on the garden.

"What is the matter?" inquired the chevalier, "what is the meaning of all these precautions?"

"Look, sir, look," said the valet de chambre.

"At what?"

"Look under the chestnut tree, down yonder."

"Very well—Ah! good heaven! I see Manicamp waiting there. What is he waiting for?"

"You will soon see if you will but have patience. There, now do you see?"

"I see, one, two, four musicians with their instruments, and behind them, pushing them on, de Guiche, in person. But what is he doing there?"

"He is waiting until the door leading to the staircase of the maids of honor shall be opened to him; he will ascend by that to Madame's apartment, where some new music is to be played during the dinner."

"The information you have obtained is superb."

"Is it not so, sir?"

"And it was M. Malicorne who told you this?"

"Himself."

"He likes you then?"

"He likes the duke."

"And why so?"

"Because he wishes to be one of his household."

"By Jupiter! and so he shall. How much did he give you for saying this?"

"The secret I am now selling to you, sir."

"And for which I give you a hundred pistoles. There, take it."

"Thanks, sir. But look, the private door is opening, and a woman is beckoning to the musicians to come in."

"It is la Montalais."

"Gently, Monsieur, do not call out that name so loudly; who says Montalais says Malicorne. If you quarrel with the one, you will be in bad odor with the other."

"Fear not; I have seen nothing."

"And I have received nothing," said the valet, throwing up the purse and catching it again as he withdrew from the room.

The chevalier after having positively ascertained that Guiche had entered Madame's apartments, returned to Monsieur, whom he found splendidly attired and beaming with joy as with juvenile beauty.

"It is said," he exclaimed, "that the king adopts the sun as his device; really, monseigneur, it is to you that this device would be most suitable."

"And Guiche?"

"Unfindable. He has fled, vanished into air. Your harshness this morning, has frightened him away. He was not to be found at his house."

"Really! The crack-brained fellow is perfectly capable of having ordered post-horses and setting off to his estates in the country. Poor fellow, we will call him back again, never fear. But let us dine."

"Monseigneur, this is a day of ideas. I have still another one."

"What is it?"

"Monseigneur, Madame is vexed with you, and with good reason. You owe her some compensation; go and dine with her."

"Oh! that would be playing the submissive husband."

"It would be proving yourself a good husband. The princess will be dying of ennui. She will be crying over her plate; her eyes will be inflamed; a husband becomes odious when he allows his wife's eyes to look red. Let us go, monseigneur, let us go."

"No, my dinner has been ordered to be brought here."

"Come, now, monseigneur, come; we shall be altogether doleful here, and for myself my heart will be quite sorrowful on reflecting that Madame is yonder there, alone; and you, ferocious as you wish to appear to be, you are sighing. Take me with you to dine with Madame, and we shall surprise her delightfully. I would wager that we shall be much amused. You were wrong this morning."

"It may be so."

"There is no 'may be' in the case. It is the fact."

"Chevalier! chevalier! you are giving me ill counsel."

"I am counselling you most sagely; you are looking peculiarly handsome; your violet colored coat, embroidered with gold, becomes you admirably. Madame will be even more subjugated by the man than by the delicate attention. Come, now, monseigneur."

"Well, you have prevailed—I will go."

The duke left the room with the chevalier, and directed his steps towards the apartment of Madame.

On the way the chevalier managed to whisper these words into the ear of his valet:

"Have people stationed before the small private door, that no one may escape that way."

And he followed the duke to the ante-chamber of Madame.

The ushers were about to announce them.

"Let no one stir," cried the chevalier, in a jocose tone. "Monseigneur wishes to play off a surprise upon Madame."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MONSIEUR IS JEALOUS OF DE GUICHE.

MONSIEUR entered the apartment abruptly, as do people when they have a kind intention, and think they are conferring pleasure, or as do others when they hope to make discovery of some secret—the pitiful reward of the jealous-pated.

Madame, enraptured by the first measures of the music, was dancing most enthusiastically, having left her dinner, which she had but just commenced.

Her partner was M. de Guiche, who, with extended arms, half-closed eyes,

one knee on the floor, like those Spanish bolero dancers, with voluptuous looks and caressing gestures.

The princess was dancing round him, smiling also, and the same description of seductive provocation.

Montalais was all admiration. La Vallière, seated in one corner of the room, was looking on pensively and abstractedly.

It would be impossible to describe the effect produced on the happy couple by the sudden appearance of Monsieur. It would be as impossible to describe the effect produced upon the duke by the sight of this happy couple.

The Count de Guiche could not summon up strength to rise from his kneeling position. Madame remained statue-like, her step unfinished, and without being able to articulate a word.

The Chevalier de Lorraine, who was leaning against the door-way, smiled with all the ingenuous frankness of a man struck with profound admiration.

The livid paleness of the prince, the convulsive trembling of his hands and legs, was the first thing which struck the witnesses of this scene. A profound silence succeeded to the music of the dance.

The Chevalier de Lorraine took advantage of this interval to offer his respectful salutations to Madame and Guiche, affecting to consider them, in the revered which he addressed to both, as the two hosts of the apartment.

Monsieur, in his turn, approached them.

"I am enchanted," said he, in a hoarse voice; "I came here believing that I should find you indisposed and sorrowful; I find you, on the contrary, indulging in new pleasures; my house is the most joyous in the whole universe."

Then turning towards Guiche—

"Count," said he, "I did not know you were so admirable a dancer."

Then again addressing his wife—

"Act more kindly towards me," said he, with a bitterness which betrayed his anger; "every time you have amusements going forward in your apartments, pray invite me—I am a sadly forsaken prince."

Guiche had during this recovered his assurance, and with that natural pride which so much became him said so the prince:

"Monseigneur knows full well that my life is altogether at his service; whenever it may be necessary to prove it he will find me ready with regard

to to-day the question is to dance to the music of these violins; therefore I dance."

"And you are right," coldly replied the prince. "But, Madame," continued he, "you do not remark that your ladies carry off my gentlemen from me and deprive me of their society. Monsieur de Guiche is not in your service, Madame, but in mine. If it please you to dine alone, let me have my gentlemen; do not despise me altogether."

Madame felt the reproach and the lesson; she blushed to the very eyes.

"Sir," she replied, "I did not know when coming to the court of France that princesses of my rank were considered as Turkish women. I did not know that it was forbidden to see men; but, as this appears to be your will, I will conform to it; do not therefore feel under the least restraint should you even wish to have my windows grated with ironbars."

This retort, which made Montalais and de Guiche smile, again inflamed the anger of the prince, a good part of which had evaporated with the words he had uttered.

"Very well!" said he, with concentrated rage; "it is thus I am respected in my own house."

"Monseigneur! monseigneur," murmured the chevalier into Monsieur's ear, but loud enough for every one to imagine that he was endeavoring to pacify him.

"Let us begone!" was the duke's sole reply, dragging him away by the arm and twirling short round before Madame with so abrupt a movement that he almost ran against her.

The chevalier followed his master into his own apartment, where the prince was no sooner seated than he gave full vent to his fury.

The chevalier raised his eyes to heaven, clasped his hands, but said not a word.

"Your opinion!" cried Monsieur.

"Upon what, monseigneur?"

"On all that is passing here."

"Oh! monseigneur, it is very serious."

"It is odious! life cannot be endured at such a price."

"Only see now, how unfortunate this is!" exclaimed the chevalier, "we had hoped for perfect tranquillity after the departure of that madman Buckingham."

"And this is worse!"

"I do not say that, monseigneur"

"But I say it; for Buckingham would never have dared to do a quarter of what we have seen."

"What mean you?"

"To hide herself in order to dance, feign an indisposition to dine tête à tête."

"Oh! monseigneur, no! no!"

"Yes, yes, I say!" cried the prince whipping himself as it were into a passion, as do headstrong schoolboys, "but I will not endure it longer, people shall know what is going on."

"Monseigneur! such a scandal—"

"By heaven! am I then to restrain myself when others throw aside all restraint with regard to me. Wait for me here, chevalier, wait for me here!"

And the prince hurried into a neighboring room and inquired of an usher whether the queen-mother had returned from chapel.

Anne of Austria was happy; peace had been restored in her family, a whole people delighted with the presence of a young sovereign who appeared to promise much; the revenues of the state in good condition; peace with foreign nations assured; all gave presage of a happy future.

She sometimes reproached herself when she reflected on the poor young duke whom she had received as a mother, and driven from her as a cruel step-mother.

A sigh concluded her thoughts. The Duke of Orleans suddenly entered her room.

"My mother," cried he hastily closing the door and the tapestry which hung before it, "things cannot exist in this way any longer."

Anne of Austria raised her fine eyes with inalterable sweetness.

"Of what things are you speaking?" said she.

"I am speaking of Madame."

"Of your wife?"

"Yes, my dear mother."

"I would lay a wager that our hair-breathed Buckingham has written a farewell letter to her."

"That is not the question; did you think I was speaking of Buckingham?"

"And of whom then? For that unhappy youth was, and most erroneously, the object of your jealousy, and I thought—"

"Mother, Madame has already appointed a successor to the duke."

"What can you be thinking of Philippe? The words you use are indecorous."

"By no means; by no means; Madame has gone so far, that I am once more jealous."

"And of whom, good heaven!"

"What! you have not remarked?"

"Remarked what?"

"Have you not observed that M. de Guiche is always in her apartment, always with her?"

The queen clapped her hands and began to laugh outright.

"Philippe," said she, "this is not merely a defect in you, it is a positive disease."

"Be it what it may, madam, a defect or a disease, I suffer from it."

"And you pretend that we should cure a disease which exists only in your imagination; you wish we should approve your jealousy when there is not the slightest foundation for it?"

"There now, you are beginning, with regard to this one, to act precisely as you did for the other."

"It is, my son," drily replied the queen, "because what you did with regard to the former, you are now about to continue with regard to this one."

The prince bowed, somewhat annoyed.

"And if I cite facts," said he, "will you believe them?"

"My son, were it on any other score than jealousy, I would believe you at once, without requiring any allegation, but as it regards your jealousy I promise nothing."

"Then, your majesty might as well order me to remain silent, and dismiss my cause without a hearing."

"By no means; you are my son, and I owe the indulgence of a mother—"

"Oh! pray utter your whole thought; you would say that you owe me all the indulgence that a madman merits."

"Do not exaggerate, Philippe, and beware of representing your wife to me as a woman of depraved mind—"

"But the facts!"

"I am listening."

"This morning they were playing music in Madame's apartments."

"That is perfectly innocent."

"M. de Guiche was alone talking with her. Ah! I had forgotten to say that for the last eight days he attends her as closely as her shadow."

"My dear Philippe, if there were any thing wrong they would be more secret."

"Good!" cried the duke. "I was awaiting that; please to remember what you have just now said. This morn-

ing, as I was saying, I surprised them, and I with some impatience evinced my displeasure."

"Be assured that will suffice; it was perhaps a little too severe. These young women are apt to take offence. To reproach them with a fault they have not committed, is sometimes a hint to them to do wrong."

"'Tis well, 'tis well. Wait a little; pray remember this last remark of yours as well as the other, madam, that this morning's lesson would suffice, and that if there were any thing wrong they would be more secret."

"I did say so."

"Well, regretting the vivacity I had exhibited in the morning, and thinking that de Guiche was out of humor, and had gone home, I went to Madame's apartment, and what do you imagine I saw there? other musicians, dancing, and de Guiche, and all this in secret."

Anne of Austria frowned.

"That was imprudent," she remarked; "and what did Madame say?"

"Nothing."

"And Guiche?"

"Nothing either. But stay; yes, he stammered out something impertinent."

"And what do you conclude from this, Philippe?"

"That I was deceived; that Buckingham was only a pretext, and the really culpable person was de Guiche."

Anne of Austria shrugged up her shoulders.

"And consequently?"

"It is my will that Guiche should leave my house as Buckingham did; and I shall request the king, unless indeed—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you, madam, you who are so good, and manage these matters so admirably, would undertake the commission."

"Indeed I will not."

"How, mother!"

"Hear me, Philippe; it is not every day that I feel disposed to say disagreeable things to people. I have some authority over these young people; but I cannot avail myself of it frequently, without risking to lose it altogether. Moreover, there is nothing in all this to prove to me that M. de Guiche is culpable."

"He has displeased me."

"That is your own affair."

"Well then, I know what I have to do," said the prince, impetuously.

Anne of Austria looked at him anxiously.

"And what will you do," she inquired.

"I will have him drowned the first time he ventures into my house."

And having uttered these ferocious words, the prince expected to hear some exclamation of terror in reply to them; but the queen remained perfectly impassible.

"Do so," said she, "if you will."

Philippe was as weak as a woman, and he began to groan and howl.

"I am betrayed. No one loves me. My mother even sides with my enemies."

"Your mother sees farther into this affair than you do, and does not care to counsel you, because you do not listen to her."

"I will go to the king."

"I was about to propose it to you. I am expecting his majesty here; it is the hour at which he visits me. Explain the matter to him."

She had scarcely concluded, when Philippe heard the door of the antechamber opened noisily. He became alarmed. The king's steps could be heard, for his shoes creaked upon the carpet.

The duke fled through a side door, leaving the queen to fight his battles for him.

Anne of Austria laughed at his sudden departure, and was still laughing when the king entered the room.

He was coming, very affectionately, to inquire after her health, which was already considerably impaired. He came, also, to announce to her that all the preparatives for the journey to Fontainebleau were accomplished.

Seeing her thus laughing, his anxiety with regard to her health was alleviated, and he addressed her also smilingly.

Anne of Austria took his hand, and in a joyous tone said to him—

"Do you know that I feel proud of being a Spanish woman?"

"And on what account, madam?"

"Because the Spanish women are better, at all events, than the English."

"Pray explain."

"Since you have been married you have not had a single reason to reproach the queen."

"Most assuredly not."

"And it is already some time since you were married. Your brother, on the contrary, has been married only a fortnight."

"Well?"

"He is complaining of Madame for the second time."

"What, Buckingham again?"

"No, another."

"Who?"

"Guiche."

"Ah! indeed; then Madame must be a complete coquette."

"I fear so."

"Oh! my poor brother!" cried the king, laughing.

"You excuse coquetry, it would appear?"

"In Madame, yes; Madame is not a coquette at heart."

"Be it so; but she will drive your brother mad."

"What does he require?"

"He wishes to have Guiche drowned."

"That is a rather violent measure."

"Nay, do not laugh; he is perfectly exasperated. Think of some means."

"Of saving Guiche?" most willingly."

"Oh! if your brother were to hear you he would conspire against you, as did Monsieur, your uncle, against your father."

"No, Philippe loves me too much for that, and I love him also. We shall always live as friends together. What is the summing up of his request?"

"It is, that you should keep Madame from being a coquette, and Guiche from being amiable."

"Only that? my brother conceives a most exaggerated idea of royal power. To correct a woman! with a man indeed we might stand some chance."

"And how will you set about it?"

"A single word whispered to Guiche, who is a youth of talent, and I can persuade him."

"But Madame."

"That is a more difficult matter; one word will not suffice. I will compose an homily, and I will preach to her."

"There is no time to be lost."

"Oh! I will be as diligent as possible; we have a rehearsal of the ballet this afternoon."

"Do you mean to preach while you are dancing?"

"Yes, madam."

"Do you promise to convert her?"

"I will extirpate the heresy, either by conviction or by fire."

"This is as it should be. But do not mix me up in this matter; Madame would never forgive me for it, and I

ought to remain upon good terms with my daughter-in-law."

"Madam, the king will take the whole matter upon himself; but, let me reflect a moment."

"On what?"

"It would perhaps be better that I should go at once to see Madame."

"That would be making a rather solemn affair of it."

"Yes, but solemnity does not ill become a preacher; and besides the violins of the ballet would devour the one half of my arguments. Moreover, it is necessary to prevent any violence on the part of my brother: a little precipitation therefore may, perhaps, be better. Is Madame now at home?"

"I believe so."

"What is the nature of the complaint, if you please?"

"In two words, it is this: Continual music, Guiche's assiduities, suspicions of coquetry, and plots."

"The proofs."

"None, whatever."

"Tis well. I will go at once to Madame." And the king began to examine his toilette, in the looking glass: it was magnificent; and his face, which was as resplendent as his diamonds.

"Let Monsieur be kept out of the way," said he.

"Oh! fire and water do not avoid each other with more eagerness," replied the queen-mother.

"That suffices. Mother, I kiss your hands—the loveliest hands in France."

"Succeed, sire; be the pacificator in your brother's family."

"I employ no ambassador," replied Louis XIV., "and that suffices to insure success."

He left the room laughing; and on his way to Madame's apartment was very careful to fillip off the specks of powder which had fallen on his dress.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MEDIATOR.

WHEN the king made his appearance in Madame's apartment, all the courtiers whom the rumors of the conjugal scene had attracted to that neighborhood, began to imagine that something very serious was about to happen. A storm also appeared to be brewing, of which the Chevalier de Lorraine, glad

ing into every group as it formed, was delightfully analyzing the various elements, enlarging upon the slightest rumors, and manœuvring with the more important ones, in order to produce the most mischievous possible effects.

As Anne of Austria had foreseen, the king's presence gave a solemn character to the event.

The discontent of Monsieur against Madame was no trifling affair in the year of grace 1662; and its importance was enhanced by the intervention of the king in the private affairs of Monsieur.

And, therefore, immediately on the king's appearance, it was observed that even some of the boldest among the courtiers, who were standing round and conversing with de Guiche, withdrew from him with a sort of terror; and the count himself, influenced by this general panic, retired alone to his own house.

The king entered Madame's apartment, bowing to the courtiers as he passed, as was his general custom. The ladies of honor were ranged in rows as he passed along the gallery.

Although his majesty's mind was much preoccupied, he could not avoid casting a glance on these two rows of young and charming women, who modestly cast down their eyes when the king gazed upon them.

They all blushed when they found his eyes directed towards them. One of them, alone, whose long hair fell in silken ringlets on the whitest skin the world had ever beheld—she alone, was pale, and appeared to support herself with difficulty, notwithstanding the premonitory nudges of her companion's elbow.

It was la Vallière whom Montalais was sustaining in this manner, whispering to her to inspire her with some of the courage with which she herself was so abundantly provided.

The king could not avoid looking back. All those faces, which had already been raised, were again cast down, but the fair-haired one was the only one that remained motionless, as if she had exhausted all her strength and intelligence.

On entering Madame's room, the king found her reclining upon the cushions of an ottoman. She rose to receive him, and made a low courtesy, and stammered out some few words to thank him for the honor she received.

Then she sat down again, overcome

by weakness which was no doubt affected, for a charming color flushed her cheeks, and her eyes which were still wet from tears recently shed, were only the more brilliant from them.

When the king had seated himself, and had remarked with that perspicuity which characterized him, the disordered state of the room and the agitated features of Madame, he assumed a lively air.

"Sister," said he, "at what hour will it please you to rehearse our ballet to-day?"

Madame shook her lovely head slowly and languishingly.

"Ah! sire," she said, "please to excuse me from this rehearsal; I was about to send to you to forewarn you that I could not to-day."

"How!" said the king, with moderated surprise, "are you then indisposed?"

"Yes, sire."

"I will then send for your physicians."

"No; for the physicians would not find a remedy for my disease."

"You alarm me!"

"Sire, I would ask your majesty's permission to return to England."

The king started with surprise.

"To England! do you really mean what you have said, Madame?"

"I say it with much regret," replied the granddaughter of Henry IV. resolutely, and her fine eyes flashed fire. "Yes, it grieves me to be compelled to confide such a wish to your majesty; but I feel too unhappy in your majesty's court; I wish to return to my own family."

"Madame! Madame!"

And the king drew nearer to her.

"Listen to me, sire," continued the young princess, assuming by degrees the ascendancy which her beauty and her firmness, gave her over her brother-in-law. "I am habituated to suffering. Even when a child I was humiliated, disdained. Oh! do not contradict me, sire;" she added, with a smile.

The king blushed.

"I therefore must believe, that God created me for this, me, the daughter of a powerful king—but as it pleased Him to deprive my father of life—he may well thus humble my pride—I have suffered much. I have been the cause of great suffering to my mother and I have sworn that if God ever placed me in an independent position, was it even that of a work-woman of the lowest class, who gains her bread

by the labor of her hands, that I would not submit to the slightest humiliation. That day has at length arrived; I have recovered the fortune due to my rank, to my birth; I have once more reached the steps of the throne; I had thought by allying myself with a French prince, I should find in him a relation, a friend, an equal; but I now perceive that I have only found a master, and I revolt against it, sire. My mother shall know nothing of this. You, whom I respect, —and whom I—love—”

The king was much moved, no voice had hitherto thus spoken to him.

“You I was saying, you, sire—who know all, since you have come here; you will perhaps understand me; for had you not come here, I was about to address myself to you. It is an authorization to depart freely that I desire. To your delicacy I abandon, to you the first man in the world, the care of exculpating my conduct, of protecting me.”

“Sister! sister!” stammered the king, vanquished by this abrupt attack, “have you maturely considered the enormous difficulties which stand in the way of the project you have formed?”

“Sire, I do not reflect, I feel; attacked, my instinct teaches me at once to repel the attack, and that is all.”

“But what has then been done? Let us hear.”

The princess had, as will be seen, by a manœuvre peculiar to women, avoided a reproach by making a more formidable one, and become the accuser instead of being the accused. It is an infallible sign of culpability. But from this evident evil, women, even the least skilful, know how to derive advantage, and overcome their adversary.

The king did not remember that he had visited the princess for the purpose of asking her, “What have you done to my brother?” and that he had been reduced to the necessity of asking, “What has been done to you?”

“What has been done to me!” replied Madame, “oh! it is necessary to be a woman to comprehend it, sire, I have been compelled to weep.”

And with a finger which had not its parallel in delicacy and pearl-like whiteness, she pointed to her brilliant eyes bathed in tears, and she again began to weep.

“Sister, I entreat you,” cried the king advancing and taking one of her hands which she allowed him to retain.

“Sire, first of all I was deprived of the presence of my brother’s friend—my lord Duke of Buckingham, was to me an agreeable, lively, guest—a countryman who knew my tastes; I would say, almost a companion, so many days had we passed together with our friends on the beautiful waters of St. James’s.”

“But, sister, Villiers was in love with you.”

“A mere pretext! and what matters it whether the Duke of Buckingham was in love with me or not? Is then a man in love dangerous to me?—Ah! sire, it does not suffice that a man should love you.”

And she smiled so tenderly, so expressively, that the king felt his heart beat violently, and as it were, sink within his breast.

“But, in short, supposing that my brother was jealous,” said the king interrupting her.

“Be it so; that is a reason, and the Duke of Buckingham was driven away.”

“Driven away! oh! no—”

“Expelled, expulsed, dismissed, if you like that better, sire. One of the first gentlemen of Europe, found himself compelled to quit the court of Louis XIV. King of France, like a lover, for a glance of the eye or a bouquet. Such treatment is little worthy of the most gallant court—but pardon me, sire, I forgot that in thus speaking I was attacking your sovereign power.”

“Upon my word, sister, it was not I who dismissed the Duke of Buckingham, for I liked him much.”

“It was not you!” said Madame, very adroitly, “ah! so much the better.”

And she accentuated the words “*So much the better*” with an expression that implied she would have said “*So much the worse*.”

A silence of some minutes ensued.

She then continued—

“The Duke of Buckingham being gone—I now know why, and at whose suggestion—I believed that I had recovered my tranquillity—but ’twas not so. Now, Monsieur discovers another pretext—now that—”

“Now that,” rejoined the king gaily, “another presents itself; and that is natural. You are beautiful, Madame, and you will always be beloved.”

“Then,” exclaimed the princess, “I must establish a perfect solitude around me—it is that which is desired

—it is that that is preparing for me. But no, I prefer returning to London. There they know me, they can appreciate me. I shall there have friends without apprehending that they will be deemed my lovers. Fie! 'tis a suspicion unworthy of a gentleman. Oh! Monsieur has lost my esteem for him since I perceive that he wishes to become a tyrant."

"There! there! my brother is only guilty from his great love to you."

"Love! Monsieur love me! oh! sire." And she laughed boisterously. "Monsieur will never love a woman! Monsieur is too much in love with himself. No, unhappily for me, Monsieur's jealousy is of the worst description; 'tis jealousy without love."

"You must however acknowledge," said the king, who was becoming enraptured by this exciting conversation, "you must acknowledge that Guiche loves you."

"Ah! sire, of that I know nothing."

"But you must see it. A man who loves betrays himself."

"M. de Guiche has not betrayed himself."

"Sister! sister! you are defending M. de Guiche!"

"Who, I! that is too much! Oh! sire, there was nothing wanting to fill my cup of misery but that you should suspect me."

"No, Madame, no," eagerly replied the king; "do not thus afflict yourself. Oh! you weep. Be tranquillized, I conjure you."

She however did weep bitterly; big tears were falling on her hand.

The king took one of her hands and kissed off one of those tears.

She looked at him at once so sorrowfully and so tenderly that the king was smitten to the heart.

"You have no feeling towards Guiche?" said he, with more uneasiness than became the part he was playing as a mediator.

"None, not the least."

"I may then tranquillize my brother."

"Ah! sire, nothing will tranquillize him. Do not for a moment believe that he is jealous. Monsieur has evil counsellors, and Monsieur is of an unquiet temper."

"A man may be so when you are in question."

Madame cast down her eyes, and remained silent. The king did the same. He still retained her hand.

This silence of a minute appeared an age.

Madame gently withdrew her hand. She was henceforth certain of her triumph. The field of battle was her own.

"Monsieur complains," timidly observed the king, "that you prefer to his conversation, to his society, the society of others."

"Sire, Monsieur passes his life in contemplating his own face in a looking glass, and in inventing all sorts of defamatory horrors against our sex with the Chevalier de Lorraine."

"Oh! you are going rather too far."

"I speak of that which is. Observe, and you will discover, sire, if I am right."

"I will observe: but, in the mean time, what satisfaction is to be given to my brother?"

"My departure."

"You repeat that word!" imprudently exclaimed the king, as if the last ten minutes should have produced such an effect as to have changed all Madame's preconceived ideas.

"Sire, I can no longer be happy here," she replied. "M. de Guiche's presence annoys Monsieur. Will he also be driven away?"

"If it be necessary why should he not?" smilingly observed the king.

"And then, after M. de Guiche, whom I shall regret, moreover, and of this I forewarn you, sire."

"Ah! you will regret him?"

"Undoubtedly; he is amiable; he has a friendship for me: he amuses me."

"Ah! if Monsieur did but hear you!" cried the king, somewhat piqued, "do you know I would not engage to reconcile you, and would not even attempt it?"

"Sire, in the present state of things could you prevent Monsieur from being jealous of any indifferent individual? Not that I mean to say that M. de Guiche is an indifferent individual."

"Again I forewarn you that as a good brother I shall entertain a perfect horror of M. de Guiche."

"Ah! sire," exclaimed Madame, "I entreat you, do not adopt either the sympathies or the hatreds of Monsieur. Remain the king; it will be better for you and for every body."

"You are adorable even in your raillery, Madame, and I can understand that even those you wound most with your wit must still adore you."

"And it is for this reason that you

sire, you whom I should have chosen for my defender, are about to ally yourself with those who are my persecutors," said Madame.

"I your persecutor! Heaven preserve me from it."

"Then," continued she, languishingly, "grant me my request."

"What is it you require?"

"To return to England."

"Oh! as to that, never! never!" cried Louis XIV.

"I am then a prisoner?"

"In France, yes."

"What then am I to do?"

"Well! sister, I will tell you."

"I listen to your majesty, as an humble servant."

"Instead of giving yourself up to intimacies which are somewhat thoughtless, instead of alarming us by thus withdrawing from our society, show yourself to us always, do not leave us, let us live as one family. There is no doubt that M. de Guiche is amiable; but, in short, if we have not his wit—"

"Oh! sire, you know that in this you are merely pretending modesty."

"No, I assure you. One may be king and yet feel that we have less chance of pleasing than such or such a gentleman."

"And I affirm that you do not believe a single word of what you have just now said."

The king looked tenderly at Madame.

"Will you promise me one thing?" said he.

"What is it?"

"It is, that you will no longer lose with strangers in your cabinet that time which you owe to us. Will you consent that we should enter into an alliance, offensive and defensive, against the common enemy?"

"An alliance with you, sire?"

"And why not? Are you not a sovereign power?"

"But you, sire, are you a very faithful ally?"

"You will see, Madame."

"And from what time is this alliance to date?"

"From this very day."

"And I shall dictate the terms of the treaty?"

"Agreed."

"And you will sign it?"

"Blindfold."

"Ah! then, sire, I will promise you marvellous things; you are the star of the court. When you shall appear—"

"Well?"

"Every thing shall be resplendent."

"Oh! Madame," said Louis XIV., "you well know that all light proceeds from you, and if I take the sun for my device it is only as an emblem."

"Sire, you are flattering your ally, and therefore you wish to deceive her," said Madame, threatening the king with her pretty fingers.

"How? you believe that I am deceiving you, when I assure you of my affection?"

"Yes."

"And what is it that makes you doubt?"

"One thing."

"One only?"

"Yes."

"What is it then? I should be most unfortunate, truly, could I not triumph over a single obstacle."

"The thing in question is not in your power—not even in the power of heaven."

"What is this thing, then?"

"The past."

Madame, I do not understand you," said the king, and he said this because he understood her but too clearly.

The princess took his hand.

"Sire," said she, "I was for so long a time displeasing to you, that I have almost the right to ask you now how it was that you consented to receive me as your sister-in-law?"

"Displease?—you had displeased me?"

"Come now, do not deny it."

"Permit me—"

"No, no. I too well remember—"

"Our alliance dates from to-day," cried the king, with a warmth that was not feigned; "for you, you must no longer remember the past; nor I neither; I shall think only of the present. I have it now before my eyes—look!"

And he led the princess to a looking-glass, in which she saw herself blushing and beautiful enough to have caused the perdition of a saint.

"Be that as it may," she said, "the alliance is not a very valiant alliance."

"Do you wish me to swear to maintain it?" asked the king, enraptured by the voluptuous turn which the conversation had assumed.

"Oh! I will not refuse a good binding oath," said Madame; "it gives at least an appearance of security."

The king knelt down upon a cushion and took Madame's hand.

With a smile which a painter could not depict, and which a poet could not do more than imagine, she tendered him both her hands, in which he hid his burning forehead.

Neither the one nor the other could utter a single word.

The king felt that Madame was withdrawing her hands, which slightly touched his cheeks.

He immediately rose and left the apartment.

The courtiers remarking that the king's face was much flushed imagined that the scene had been a stormy one.

But the Chevalier de Lorraine hastened to remark—

"Oh! no, gentlemen, you need not be alarmed. When the king is angry he turns pale."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COUNSELLORS.

THE king left Madame in a state of agitation, which he would have found difficult to explain even to himself.

It is, in fact, impossible to explain the secret play of those strange sympathies which suddenly and without cause are kindled in the human heart, and this after many years passed in the greatest calmness, in the most perfect indifference between two persons destined to love each other.

Why had Louis formerly disdained, nay, even almost hated Madame? Why was it that now he considered this woman so beautiful, so desirable, and why should he now not only think of her, but think of her so much? Why, in fine, should Madame, whose eyes and heart were solicited in another quarter, within the last eight days, have evinced towards the king that appearance of favor which lead to the suspicion of a more perfect intimacy.

It must not be believed that Louis had proposed to himself any settled plan of seduction; the tie which bound Madame to his brother was, or at least appeared to him, a barrier not to be overleaped; he was even yet at such a distance from this barrier as not to perceive that it existed. But in the proclivity of those passions in which the heart delights, towards which youth hurries us, no one can say where he will stop, not even he who has pre-

viously calculated all the chances of success or failure.

As to Madame, her inclination for the king, can be easily explained; she was young, a coquette, and had a passionate desire to inspire admiration.

She possessed one of those natures subject to impetuous outbreaks, which had she been on the stage, would have led her to leap through volumes of flame in order to compel the spectators to utter shouts of applause.

It was not therefore surprising, that, in due progression, after having been adored by Buckingham and by de Guiche, who was superior to Buckingham, were it only for that great merit so highly appreciated by women, namely, novelty; it was not therefore surprising, we say, that the princess should elevate her ambition even to be admired by the king, who was not only the first man of the kingdom, but one of the handsomest and most intellectual.

As to the sudden passion of Louis for his sister-in-law, physiologists would explain it by common-place theorism, and nature by some of her mysterious affinities. Madame had the most beautiful black eyes, and Louis the finest blue ones, in the world; Madame was lively, laughing, and communicative, Louis melancholy and discreet. Called for the first time to meet on a question of mutual interest and curiosity, these two opposed natures had become inflamed by the contact of their reciprocal asperities.

Louis on returning to his own apartment, discovered that Madame was the most seductive woman in his court.

Madame, when alone, reflected with much delight, on the lively impression she had produced upon the king.

But, in her, this feeling must remain passive, while with the king, it could not fail to act with all the vehemence natural to the inflammable mind of a young man, who has only to express his will, in order to see that will executed.

The king immediately announced to Monsieur that all was pacified; that Madame entertained towards him the greatest respect, the most sincere affection; but she was of a haughty disposition, easily offended even, and that her susceptibility required to be very carefully managed.

Monsieur replied in the fretful tone which he generally assumed when conversing with his brother, that he could not well comprehend the susceptibilities

of a woman whose conduct had given cause for censure, and if any one had a right to feel hurt, it was to him, Monsieur, that such right incontestably appertained.

But the king replied in a tone sufficiently sharp to prove the interest he felt for his sister-in-law.

"Thank heaven! Madame is above all censure."

"Of others, yes," added Monsieur, "that I admit, but not above mine, I presume."

"Well then," replied the king, "I will tell you, that Madame does not deserve your censure. She is doubtless a giddy, singular young woman; but one who entertains the best feelings. The English character is not always correctly understood in France. The freedom of English manners sometimes astonish those who are not aware how much those freedoms are exalted by innocence."

"Ah!" cried Monsieur, more and more nettled, "since your majesty absolves my wife whom I accuse, my wife cannot be culpable, and I have no more to say."

"Brother," quickly rejoined the king, who felt the voice of conscience whispering to him that Monsieur was not altogether in the wrong, "brother, what I am saying and, above all, what I am doing is for your happiness. I had been informed that you had complained of a want of confidence, or a want of attention on the part of Madame, and I did not wish that your anxiety should be any farther prolonged. It is a part of my duty to watch over your house, as it is over those of the most humble of my subjects. It was therefore with the greatest pleasure that I ascertained that your alarm had no foundation whatever."

"And," continued Monsieur in an interrogative tone, fixing his eyes upon his brother, "what your majesty has ascertained with regard to Madame, and I bow before your royal wisdom, have you also ascertained with regard to those who have been the cause of all this scandal of which I complain?"

"You are perfectly right, brother," said the king, "I will reflect upon it."

These words contained at the same time, an order and a consolation. The prince felt this and withdrew.

As to Louis, he went in search of his mother; he felt that he needed an absolution, more positive than that

which he had just received from his brother.

Anne of Austria had not the same reasons for indulgent feeling towards Guiche which she had entertained for Buckingham.

She comprehended, from the first words he uttered, that Louis was not disposed to be severe; she was so.

It was one of the habitual artifices of the good queen, in order to ascertain the actual truth.

But Louis was no longer in his apprenticeship, he had been really a king for nearly a whole year. During this year he had had time to learn to dissemble.

Listening to Anne of Austria, in order that she might develop her entire thought, approving what she said by merely a look or gesture, he ascertained from certain penetrating looks, from certain adroit insinuations, that the queen, so perspicuous in affairs of galantry, had, if not divined, at all events suspected his weakness for Madame.

Of all his auxiliaries, Anne of Austria would necessarily be the most important; of all his enemies Anne of Austria would be the most dangerous.

Louis therefore changed his tactics.

He accused Madame, absolved Monsieur, listened to what his mother said of Guiche, as he had listened to what she had formerly said of Buckingham. Then, when he saw that she imagined she had gained a complete victory over him, he left her.

The whole court, that is to say all the favorites and intimates, and they were numerous, since there were five masters, assembled together in the evening for the rehearsal of the ballet.

During this interval poor de Guiche's time had been occupied by receiving some few visits.

In the number of these visits there was one he dreaded as much as he desired it.

It was that of the Chevalier de Lorraine.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon, the Chevalier de Lorraine entered Guiche's house.

The expression of his countenance was of a most consoling nature. He told Guiche that Monsieur was in most excellent humor, and that no one would imagine that any cloud had passed over the conjugal sky.

Besides, which, Monsieur had so little malice in his disposition.

Having resided so long at court, the

Chevalier de Lorraine had ascertained that of the two sons of Louis XIII. it was Monsieur who had adopted the character of his father, who was always vacillating and irresolute; good from sudden impulse, bad at heart, but perfectly null as regarded his friends.

He had above all inspired Guiche with the idea that it would not be long before Madame would manage to lead her husband at her pleasure, and, consequently, that he would govern Monsieur, who should succeed in governing Madame.

To which Guiche, who was mistrustful, but had great presence of mind, had replied,

"Yes, chevalier, but I believe Madame to be very dangerous."

"And in what?"

"In as much as she has seen that Monsieur has not a disposition to be passionately fond of any woman."

"That is true," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, laughing.

"And consequently—"

"Well?"

"Well, Madame takes the first person who presents himself, shows a marked preference for him, in order to bring her husband back to her by exciting his jealousy."

"Profound! profound!" exclaimed the chevalier.

"'Tis true!" said Guiche.

And neither the one nor the other uttered his real thought.

Guiche at the moment he thus attacked the character of Madame, mentally asked her pardon from the bottom of his heart.

The chevalier while admiring the profundity of Guiche, was leading him blindfold to the brink of a precipice.

Guiche then questioned him more directly upon the effect which that morning's scene had produced, and the more serious effect produced by the dinner scene.

"Why, I have already told you that every one laughed at it," replied the chevalier, "and Monsieur more than any one."

"And yet," Guiche ventured to add, "I have heard of a visit made by the king to Madame."

"Well, that is it precisely; Madame was the only one who did not laugh, and the king called upon her to make her laugh too."

"So that—"

"So that nothing has been changed in the previous regulations for the day."

"And the ballet is to be rehearsed this evening?"

"Certainly."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

At this period of the conversation, Raoul entered the room; his brow was gloomy.

On perceiving him the Chevalier de Lorraine, who entertained towards him as he did towards all noble natures, a secret hatred, rose to take leave.

"You do not offer me any advice then?" said Guiche to the chevalier.

"I advise you to sleep tranquilly, my dear count."

"And I, Guiche," said Raoul, "will give advice totally to the contrary."

"And what is that, my friend?"

"It is to get on horseback, and set out for one of your estates; once arrived there, if you wish to follow the advice of the chevalier, sleep as long and as tranquilly as may be agreeable to you."

"How! leave Paris?" cried the chevalier with affected surprise. "And why should Guiche leave Paris."

"Because,—and you, you above all ought not to be ignorant of it, because all the world are already talking of a scene which has passed between Monsieur and Guiche."

Guiche turned pale.

"By no means," replied the chevalier, "by no means; and you have been ill-informed, M. de Bragelonne."

"On the contrary, I have been perfectly well-informed, sir," replied Raoul; "and the advice I have given Guiche is the advice of a friend."

During this discussion, Guiche, somewhat agitated, looked alternately at his two advisers.

He felt intimately convinced that a game important to the remainder of his life was playing at that moment.

"Is it not true?" said the chevalier, addressing the count himself; "is it not true, that the scene was not so stormy as the Viscount de Bragelonne appears to think, who, moreover, was not present,"

"Sir," persisted Raoul, "stormy or not, it is not precisely of the scene itself that I am speaking, but of the consequences it may produce. I know that Monsieur has threatened; I know that Madame has wept."

"Madame has wept?" imprudently exclaimed Guiche, clasping his hands.

"Ah! that for example," said the chevalier, laughing; "that is a detail

of which I was ignorant; you are decidedly better informed upon the subject than I am, Monsieur de Bragelonne."

"And it is therefore, being better informed than you are, that I insist on Guiche's departure."

"But no, no, again I say—I regret to contradict you, viscount—his departure would be useless."

"It is urgent."

"But why should he set off? Come now, let us hear."

"Why the king! the king!"

"The king!" exclaimed Guiche.

"The king, I tell you, takes the affair to heart."

"Bah!" cried the chevalier; "the king likes Guiche, and above all, his father; reflect, that should the count leave Paris, it would be acknowledging that he has done something reprehensible."

"And how so?"

"Undoubtedly; when a man runs away, it is either because he is guilty, or is afraid."

"Or because he is offended at having been wrongfully accused," said Bragelonne. "Let us give to his departure the appearance of having been caused by his being offended; nothing can be more easy; we will say that we both did all we could to prevent his going: and you, at all events, will speak the truth. Come, come, Guiche, you are innocent; and as an innocent man, this day's scene must have wounded you. Therefore, away with you, Guiche! away with you!"

"Why, no. Guiche, remain here," said the chevalier; "and precisely for the reason given by M. de Bragelonne—that you are innocent. I once more entreat your pardon, viscount, but my opinion is diametrically the contrary of yours."

"You are perfectly free to entertain it, sir; but let me observe that the exile which Guiche will impose upon himself will be of short duration; he can terminate it at his own pleasure; and, returning from a voluntary exile, he will find a smile on every face: whereas, on the contrary, should the king be displeased, it may bring on a storm, the end of which no one can foresee."

The chevalier smiled.

"That is precisely what I desire, by Heaven!" muttered he to himself.

And at the same moment he shrugged up his shoulders.

This gesture did not escape the count's notice; he feared, should he leave the court, that it would have the appearance of yielding to a feeling of alarm.

"No, no, I have decided," said he; "Bragelonne, I will remain."

"Prophet I am," groaned Raoul sorrowfully. "Woe to you, Guiche! Woe to you!"

"I also am a prophet, but not the prophet of misfortune;—on the contrary, count, I say, remain, remain."

"Are you quite sure the ballet is to be rehearsed?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Well now, Raoul, you must perceive," continued de Guiche with a forced smile, "you must see that the court is not so very gloomy, nor prepared for internal dissensions, since they can dance with so much assiduity. Come now, acknowledge that, Raoul."

Raoul shook his head.

"I have not another word to say," he replied.

"But, in fine," observed the chevalier, curious to know from what source Raoul had drawn the information he possessed, the correctness of which he could not but acknowledge to himself, "you say that you are well informed, viscount; how can you be better so than I, one of the prince's most intimate friends?"

"Sir," replied Raoul, "I bow before a declaration of this nature. Yes, I acknowledge you must be perfectly well informed, and as a man of honor, incapable of asserting any thing but that which you really know or to speak otherwise than you think. I acknowledge myself defeated, and leave the field of battle to you."

And Raoul, in fact, like a man who appeared to desire tranquillity, threw himself into a vast arm-chair, while the count called for his servants to come and dress him.

The chevalier, finding that it was getting late, was anxious to return to the palace; but he also feared that Raoul, remaining alone with Guiche, might prevail on him to alter his intention.

He therefore brought his last reserve into action.

"Madame will be perfectly dazzling," said he. "She is to try on her costume as Pomona."

"Ah! that is true," cried the count.

"Yes, yes," continued the chevalier,

"she had just given her orders to that effect. You know, Monsieur de Bragelonne, that the king is to personify Spring."

"It will be admirable," said Guiche, "and this is the best reason you have yet given in order to decide me to remain. And as I am to take the part of Vertumnus, and to dance the *pas de deux* with Madame, I cannot absent myself without an order from the king, seeing that my departure would altogether disorganize the ballet."

"And I," said the chevalier, "am to be merely one of the *corps de ballet*, for in truth I dance but badly, and my legs are not well shaped. Gentlemen, farewell for the present. Count, do not forget the basket of fruits which you are to offer to Pomona."

"Oh! I will not forget any thing; you may be easy on that score," said Guiche, transported with joy.

"Oh!" murmured the Chevalier de Lorraine to himself, as he left the room, "I may feel perfectly safe that he will not now think of leaving us."

Raoul, when the Chevalier was gone, did not even endeavor to dissuade his friend; he felt that it would be useless trouble.

"Count," said he to him, in his melancholy and melodious voice, "Count, you are running headlong into a most fatal passion. I know you; you are extreme in every thing. She whom you love is so likewise. Well, I will for a moment admit that she may eventually love you."

"Oh! never, never," exclaimed Guiche.

"And why do you say never?"

"Because it would be a great calamity for both."

"Then, my dear friend, instead of considering you merely as imprudent, you must allow me to consider you as insane."

"And why so?"

"Are you perfectly assured—come now, answer me frankly—that you desire nothing from her you love?"

"Oh! yes, quite sure."

"Then love her from a distance."

"What mean you from a distance?"

"Undoubtedly. What matters it to you whether she be present or absent, since you desire nothing from her. Love a portrait; love a recollection."

"Raoul!"

"Love a shadow, an illusion, a chimera. Ah! you turn away your head. But your servants are coming, I will

say nothing more. Whether in good or evil fortune you may always rely on me, Guiche."

"Yes, by heaven! I always shall."

"Well, I have told you all I had to tell you. Appear to the best advantage, Guiche; be magnificently handsome. Farewell."

"You will not come, then, to the rehearsal of the ballet, viscount?"

"No, I have to pay a visit. Embrace me, Guiche. Adieu."

The assembly took place in the king's apartments.

There were first of all, the queens, then Madame, some favored ladies of honor, and a goodly number of the *élite* of the courtiers. These formed a sort of prologue to the dance by conversation, the art of which was so well understood in those days.

None of the invited ladies had attired themselves in their costumes for the ballet, as the Chevalier de Lorraine had erroneously predicted; but they talked much of the rich and ingenious designs drawn by various painters for this ballet of the demi-gods. Thus were styled the kings and the queens of which Fontainebleau was about to be the pantheon.

Monsieur came into the room, holding in his hand the drawing which represented the character he was to personate. His brow was somewhat thoughtful. His salutations to the young queen and to his mother were replete with courteousness and affection. He bowed rather cavalierly to Madame, and turned upon his heel. This gesture and his coldness were remarked.

M. de Guiche made amends for this to the princess by a burning glance, and Madame, it must be acknowledged, by raising her eyelids, returned it with usury.

Guiche had never appeared so handsome. Madame's look had rendered the countenance of the son of the Marshal de Grammont positively radiant. The sister-in-law of the king felt that a storm was gathering over his head. She felt, also, that during that day, so fruitful in future events, she had committed an injustice, if not a grave act of treachery, towards him who loved her with so much ardor and passion.

The moment appeared to her to have arrived for making amends to the devoted victim for the injustice of the morning. Madame's heart then spoke and spoke in the name of Guiche. The count was sincerely pitied; the count,

therefore, bore away the palm from all.

There was no longer any question as to Monsieur, the king, or my lord of Buckingham. Guiche at that moment reigned paramount.

And yet Monsieur was very handsome, also; but it was impossible to compare him to the count. It is well known, and every woman says it, that there is always an enormous difference between the beauty of a lover and that of a husband.

Now, in the actual state of things, after the furious outbreak of Monsieur, after his courteous and affectionate salutation to the young queen and to the queen mother; after the slight and cavalier bow he addressed to Madame, and which all the courtiers had remarked, all these incidents, we say, combined to give a great advantage to the lover over the husband.

Monsieur was too exalted a personage to pay attention to these petty details. Nothing can be more efficacious than the confirmed idea of superiority to insure the inferiority of the man who has so elevated an opinion of himself.

The king at length joined the assembly. All present endeavored to read forthcoming events in the glance of that man, which began to move the world as did the brow of Jupiter.

Louis had nothing of his brother's melancholy; his features beamed with pleasure.

Having examined most of the drawings which were presented to him from all sides, he gave his advice upon, or criticised them, thus dealing out happiness or misfortune to the artists with a single word.

Suddenly his eyes, which were glancing furtively at Madame, remarked the mute correspondence established between the princess and the count.

The royal lips were suddenly pursed up; when they were again opened it was to give passage to some commonplace or trivial expression.

"Ladies," said he, advancing towards the queen, "I have just received intelligence that every thing has been prepared, in conformity with my orders at Fontainebleau." A murmur of satisfaction was immediately heard throughout the room. The king could read on every face an ardent desire for an invitation to the fêtes.

"I shall set out to-morrow," added he.

There was a profound silence throughout the assembly.

"And I invite," concluded the king, "all those who now surround me to prepare themselves to accompany me."

Smiles illuminated every countenance. That of Monsieur alone retained an expression of ill humor.

Then all the noblemen present passed in succession before the king and the ladies, hastening to thank his majesty for the honor conferred upon them by this invitation.

When it was de Guiche's turn—

"Ah! sir," said the king to him, "I had not seen you."

The count bowed; Madame turned pale.

De Guiche was about to speak in order to offer his thanks also.

"Count," said the king, "this is the season for the second sowing. I feel assured that your farmers in Normandy will see you among them with great pleasure."

And the king turned his back on the unhappy count after this brutal attack.

It was now de Guiche's turn to become pale. He advanced two steps towards the king, forgetting that no one ever spoke to his majesty without having been first questioned.

"I am afraid I did not completely understand"—stammered he.

The king slightly turned his head and gazed at him with that cold and fixed look which plunges like an inflexible sword into the hearts of those who are in disgrace.

"I said your estates," repeated he, slowly, letting his words fall one by one.

A cold perspiration rose to the forehead of the unhappy count; his hand opened and let fall his hat, which he had held between his trembling fingers.

Louis sought to catch his mother's eye in order to ascertain whether the revenge he had taken was to her taste.

At length he cast his eyes on Madame.

The princess was smiling and talking to Madame de Noailles.

She had heard nothing, or, rather, feigned not to have heard.

The Chevalier de Lorraine was also making his observations with that inimical persistence which appears to communicate to the eye of man the power of the lever when it raises,

tears up and throws to a distance the object which opposed it.

The Count de Guiche remained alone in the king's cabinet; all the pageantry had vanished; before the eyes of the unhappy man shadows appeared to flit.

Suddenly he aroused himself from the fixed despair which had paralyzed him and rushed out of the palace, running, without once stopping, to shut himself up in his own house, where he found Raoul awaiting his return, still tenaciously adhering to his gloomy forebodings.

"Well!" cried he, on seeing his friend come in bareheaded, with haggard eyes and vacillating steps.

"Yes, yes, you spoke truly, yes."

And Guiche could not utter another word, but fell exhausted on a sofa.

"And she?" murmured Raoul.

"She!" cried the unhappy man, raising his hand, convulsively clenched with anger, towards heaven; "she—"

"What says she?"

"She says that her dress fits her admirably."

"What did she?"

"She laughs!" and a violent fit of laughter strained every nerve of the poor exile.

He soon fell back upon the sofa, seemingly annihilated.

CHAPTER XXX.

FONTAINEBLEAU.

ALL the enchantments combined in the magnificent gardens of Fontainebleau had for four days rendered it a paradise of delight.

M. Colbert appeared perfectly ubiquitous; in the morning he arranged the accounts of the expenses of the previous night; during the day he attended to programmes of diversions, experiments, enlisting actors, payments.

M. Colbert had gathered together four millions, and expended them with sage economy.

He was alarmed at the large outlay that mythology entailed—every faun, every dryad did not cost less than a hundred livres a day. Their costumes alone cost three hundred livres.

The powder and sulphur consumed in fire-works amounted to a hundred thousand livres a night. Besides these there were illuminations round the

border of the lake to the tune of thirty thousand livres every evening.

The fêtes had been declared magnificent. Colbert was almost beside himself with joy.

He saw Madame and the king continually going out on hunting-parties, or to receive fantastic personages, solemnities which had been got up *impromptu* some fortnight before, and which gave occasion to display the wit of Madame and the munificence of the king.

For Madame, the heroine of the festival, replied to the deputations from these unknown nations, Garamanthians, Scythians, Hyperboreans, Caucasians and Patagonians, who appeared to issue from the earth in order to compliment her, and to each of the representatives of these nations the king gave some diamond, or an article of value.

Then these deputations, in verses more or less grotesque, compared the king to the sun, Madame to Phœbe his sister, and they spoke no more of the queen or of Monsieur, than if the king had actually espoused Henrietta of England and not Marie Therese of Austria.

The happy couple, seated side by side, and hand in hand, imperceptibly pressing each other's fingers, drank down large draughts of the honied beverage of adulation, rendered so much the more palatable by youth, beauty, power, and love.

Every one at Fontainebleau marvelled at the great influence which Madame had so rapidly attained over the king.

Every body whispered that Madame was in reality the queen.

And, in fact, the king proclaimed this strange truth, by every thought, by every word he uttered, by every look he gave.

He imbibed his will, he sought his inspirations in Madame's eyes, and he was intoxicated with delight when Madame deigned to smile.

And was Madame intoxicated by her power on seeing all the world at her feet?

She could not herself have solved this question, but that which she did know, was that she formed no desire, that she thought herself completely happy.

The result of all these transpositions, the source of which arose in the royal will, was, that Monsieur instead of being the second personage of the kingdom, had in fact become the third.

It was much worse than during the time when Guiche brought his guitar player to Madame's apartment. Then Monsieur had at least the satisfaction of terrifying the person who annoyed him.

But since the departure of the enemy, driven away by his alliance with the king, Monsieur had now upon his shoulders a burden infinitely more weighty than before.

Every evening, Madame returned home completely exhausted.

Riding on horseback, bathing in the Seine, spectacles, dining beneath the trees, balls on the banks of the great canal, concerts—all these would have been enough to kill, not merely a thin and delicate woman, but the most robust Swiss in the palace.

It is true that with regard to dancing, concerts, and promenades, a woman is even more strongly constituted than the most vigorous male native of the thirteen cantons.

But however great may be the strength of a woman, it has its limit, and she cannot long hold out against such a regimen.

As to Monsieur, he had not even the satisfaction of seeing Madame abdicate her royalty in the evening.

At night Madame was lodged in the royal pavilion with the young queen and the queen-mother.

It is unnecessary to say that the Chevalier de Lorraine never left Monsieur's side, and that he poured his drop of gall into every wound the prince's self-love received.

The result of all this was that Monsieur, who after the departure of Guiche had become quite joyous, fell into his old fits of melancholy three days after the establishment of the Court at Fontainebleau.

So that it one day happened that Monsieur having risen later than usual, it being about two o'clock, and having paid more attention than was habitual, even with him, to his toilette, it happened that Monsieur, who had heard nothing of the projects of the day, took it into his head to assemble his own court around him, and to take Madame to sup with him at Moret, where he had a beautiful country house.

He therefore directed his steps towards the royal pavilion, entered it, and was much surprised at not finding a single man belonging to the royal household.

He entered alone into the apartments.

One door opened on the left into the rooms allotted to Madame, one on the right to those of the young queen.

Monsieur was informed by a sempstress who was working in Madame's apartment, that every body had gone out at eleven o'clock to bathe in the Seine; that this party had been considered as a great fête; that all the carriages had been ranged at the park gates, and that the departure had taken place a long time before.

"Good," said Monsieur to himself, "a very happy idea! the heat is oppressive; and I would willingly take a bath myself."

And he called for his servants. No one came. Every body had gone out.

He walked down to the stables.

A groom informed him that there was not a calash or carriage of any description in the coach houses.

He then ordered that two horses should be saddled, the one for himself, the other for his valet de chambre.

The groom politely replied that there were no horses.

Monsieur, pale with anger, then went back to the queen's apartments.

He went on till he reached the oratory of Anne of Austria.

From the oratory, through the tapestry which was half open, he perceived his young sister-in-law kneeling before the queen-mother, who appeared to be weeping.

He had neither been seen nor heard.

He gently approached the opening and listened; the sight of this grief piqued his curiosity.

The young queen was not only weeping but complaining.

"Yes," she said, "the king neglects me; the king pays no attention but to his pleasures—and to pleasures in which I do not participate."

"Patience, patience, my daughter," replied Anne of Austria, in Spanish.

And then, still in the Spanish language, which Monsieur did not understand, she added some words of advice.

The queen replied by accusations accompanied by tears and sighs, during which Monsieur heard frequently repeated the word *banos*, which Mario Therese accentuated with anger and vexation.

"Ah! the baths!" said Monsieur to himself, "it appears she is enraged against the baths."

And he endeavored to piece together

the words he understood so as to find out their general meaning.

However, it was easy to perceive that the queen was complaining bitterly; and that if Anne of Austria did not console her, at all events she used her best efforts to effect it.

Monsieur feared that he might be discovered listening at the door; he therefore coughed to announce his presence.

The two queens, on hearing the noise, turned round.

Monsieur entered the room.

On seeing the prince the young queen rose precipitately, and wiped away her tears.

Monsieur was too much a man of the world to ask any questions, and was too polite to remain silent: he therefore offered his respects.

The queen-mother smiled affectionately.

"What do you wish, my son?" said she.

"Who I? oh! nothing," stammered the prince. "I was looking for—"

"Whom?"

"I was looking for Madame."

"Madame is gone to the baths."

"And the king?" said Monsieur, in a tone that made the queen tremble.

"The king also, together with the whole court," replied Anne of Austria.

"Excepting you, madam," said Monsieur.

"Oh! as to me," cried the young queen, "I am the terror of all those who amuse themselves."

"And I also, as it appears," rejoined Monsieur.

Anne of Austria made a sign to her daughter-in-law, who withdrew, weeping bitterly.

Monsieur knitted his brows.

"This is a melancholy house," said he. "What think you of it, mother?"

"Why no, no; every body here endeavors to be amused."

"And by heaven! it is that which renders gloomy those whom such amusements annoy."

"In what a tone you say that, my dear Philippe."

"In good truth, mother; I speak as I think."

"Explain yourself: what is the matter?"

"You have only to ask your daughter-in-law who was just now relating her grievances to you."

"Her grievances; what mean you?"

"Yes, I was listening. It was only

accidentally; but, in short, I was listening. I too clearly understood that my sister was complaining of Madame's famous baths."

"Mere madness."

"No, no, no; when persons weep they are not always mad. *Bancos*, the queen said, does not that mean baths?"

"I repeat to you, my dear son, that your sister-in-law's jealousy is perfectly puerile."

"In this case, madam," replied the prince, "I accuse myself, and very humbly, of having the same defect that she has."

"You also, my son?"

"Assuredly."

"You also are jealous of these baths?"

"Yes, by heaven!"

"Oh!"

"How! the king goes to bathe with my wife, and does not take the queen with him. How Madame goes to bathe with the king, and they do not even honor me so far as to inform me of it. And you wish that my sister-in-law should be satisfied—you wish that I should be perfectly contented!"

"But, my dear Philippe, you exaggerate matters; you had the Duke of Buckingham driven away, you caused the exile of M. de Guiche, and now, I imagine, you wish to send the king away from Fontainebleau."

"Oh! madam, I have no such pretention," said Monsieur, peevishly; but I may myself withdraw, and I will do so."

"Jealous of the king! jealous of your brother!"

"Jealous of my brother, of the king? yes madam, jealous! jealous! jealous!"

"Upon my word sir," cried Anne of Austria, affecting indignation and anger, "I begin to believe that you are crazy, a sworn enemy to my tranquillity, and leave the field to you, having no defence against such strange imaginations."

Having said this she raised the siege, and left Monsieur a prey to the most furious anger.

Monsieur remained for a moment perfectly astounded; then by degrees recovering his senses and his strength, he went for the second time down to the stables, where he found the groom, again asked him for a carriage, or for a saddle horse, and on his reiterated reply that there was neither horse nor carriage, Monsieur snatched a long riding-master's whip from the hand of

a stable boy who was hanging it up, and pursued the poor devil of a groom round the spacious stable yard, lashing him furiously in spite of his cries and excuses, and then pouting, and out of breath, the perspiration streaming from every pore, and every nerve trembling with agitation, he went up to his own rooms, smashed all the excellent porcelain they contained, and then threw himself, booted and spurred, into his bed, crying out for help.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BATH.

AT Valvins, under the impenetrable and vaulted canopy of flowering wisthies and weeping willows, bending their green heads and dipping their graceful branches in the blue waters, was a long flat bark covered with an awning of blue silk, which served as a refuge to the bathing Dianas, whose coming out of the water was watched by twenty Actæons with flowing plumes and who were galloping, full of ardor and with longing eyes, upon the mossy and perfumed border of the river.

But Diana, even the chaste Diana, attired in her long *chlamys*, was less modest, less impenetrable than Madame, who was as young and as lovely as the goddess. For despite the fine tunic of the huntress, her round white knee was visible: despite the sonorous quiver, her shoulders, tanned by the sun, could be perceived; while on the contrary a long veil, with its hundred folds, enveloped Madame when she was received by the hands of her waiting-women to take the refreshing plunge, and rendered her fair form invisible to even the most penetrating eyes.

When she re-ascended the steps, the poets présent, and all were poets when Madame was the subject, the twenty galloping poets pulled up, and with unanimous assent exclaimed that they were not drops of water but pearls that were streaming from her veil to fall into the thrice happy river.

The king, the centre of these poetical enthusiasts and this homage, imposed silence on these amplificators whose flights of fancy would never have ceased, and turned his horse's head in another

direction, fearing to alarm the modesty of the women and the dignity of the princess, although she was protected by the silken curtains.

All was perfectly silent on board the barque. By the motion, the play of the folds, the undulations of the curtains, could be imagined the hurrying to and fro of the attendants that were waiting on the young princess.

The king listened smilingly to the extravagancies of his gentlemen, but it could be perceived on looking at him that he was not attending to their discourse.

And in fact scarcely had the rings upon the curtain rods announced that Madame was dressed and that the goddess was about to appear than the king instantly returned and galloping as nearly as he could to the brink of the river, gave the signal to all those whom their service or their pleasure called to attend on Madame.

The pages were then seen hurrying forward with led horses; the carriages which had remained under the shade of the trees then advanced towards the tent, besides these a cloud of valets, who, during the bath of their mistresses, had been exchanging their observations, their criticisms, their discussions of pecuniary matters, the fugitive journal of the day, of which no one remembers any thing, not even the river's waves, the mirror of the various personages; those witnessing waves whom God has precipitated into immensity, as he has precipitated the actors in the scene into eternity.

All this crowd encumbering the bank of the river, without calculating a host of country people drawn thither by their desire to see the king and the princess, all this crowd was during about ten minutes in the most disorderly, though the most agreeable pell-mell that can be possibly conceived.

The king had alighted from his horse, all the courtiers had followed his example; he had offered his hand to Madame, whose elegant form was much set off by a rich riding habit of fine cloth embroidered in silver.

Her hair, which was still humid and blacker even than jet, moistened her beautifully fair neck—joy and health sparkled in her lovely eyes; she had been refreshed by the bath, and inhaled the pure air with evident delight beneath the embroidered parasol borne by a page.

Nothing could be more tender, more

graceful or more poetical than these two faces, tinged by the roseate shade from the parasol:—the king whose white teeth sparkled from his continual smile; Madame whose black eyes flashed like carbuncles from the reflection of the bright colored silk.

When Madame had got near her horse, a magnificent Andalusian steed of spotless white, somewhat heavy perhaps, but with a small and intelligent head, in which could be perceived Arabian blood, beautifully blended with the Spanish, and whose long tail swept the ground as the princess was negligently about to place her foot in the stirrup.

The king raised her in his arms in such a manner that Madame's arm encircled his neck.

Louis as he withdrew involuntarily grazed with his lips the arm which was not yet withdrawn, and then the princess having thanked her royal equerry, every one was in the saddle in a moment.

The king and Madame drew on one side to allow the carriages the outriders and the courtiers to pass by.

A goodly number of cavaliers released from the yoke of etiquette, gave the rein to their horses and galloped after the carriages which contained the maids of honor, rosy as the Oreades who surrounded Diana, and this laughing, chatting, noisy whirlwind rushed gaily onwards.

The king and Madame restrained their horses to a footpace.

Behind his majesty and the princess his sister-in-law, but at a respectful distance, rode the graver courtiers, who were desirous of remaining within call, and in sight of the king. They restrained their fiery horses, regulating their paces according to those of the king and the princess's, and giving themselves up to the delight of conversation which men of wit enjoy when courteously relating a thousand scandalous stories of their immediate neighbors.

In the stifled laugh, in the suppressed hilarity of this sardonic sarcasm, Monsieur the unfortunate absentee was by no means spared.

But they pitied, they lamented the fate of Guiche, and it must be acknowledged that their compassion was by no means ill bestowed.

However, the king and Madame, having breathed their horses, and re-

peated a hundred times all the follies which the courtiers had imagined for them, put them into a hand gallop, and then the deep recesses of the forest resounded beneath the tramp of the cavalcade.

To the conversations in half whispers, to the seemingly confidential hints, to wordsexchanged with mysterious looks, succeeded noisy outbursts. From the outriders up to the princess, joyousness seemed the order of the day, all were laughing, and speaking loudly. The magpies and the jays were seen flying before them with their guttural shrieks, beneath the undulating canopies of majestic oaks. The cuckoo paused in his monotonous complaining in the depths of the wood. Sparrows and finches flew before them in clouds, while stags, roebucks and does sprang terrified into the thickets.

This crowd, communicating like a train of gunpowder, joy, noise and light as it advanced, was preceded to the palace by what may be termed its own report.

The king and Madame entered the town, greeted at every step by the plaudits of the crowd.

Madame hastened to seek Monsieur; she felt instinctively that he had been too long kept aloof from all this joy.

The king went to join the queens, he knew his duty, to one in particular, and felt he owed her some compensation for his protracted absence.

But Madame was not received by Monsieur. She was informed that Monsieur was asleep.

The king instead of meeting Marie Therese smiling as usual, found his mother in the gallery who was awaiting his arrival; advancing to meet him, she took him by the hand and led him to her own room.

What they said to each other, or rather what the queen-mother said to Louis XIV. no one has ever known, but it might assuredly have been easily divined by the annoyed expression of the king's countenance, when he issued from this interview.

But we, whose trade it is to interpret, as it is to communicate to our reader the result of our interpretation, we should fail in our duty did we allow him to remain ignorant of the result of this conversation.

He will find it sufficiently developed, at least we hope so, in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BUTTERFLY HUNT.

THE king, on returning to his own apartment to give some orders and to consult his letters, found upon his writing-table a small note in a folded hand.

He opened it and read.

"Come quickly. I have a thousand things to say to you."

Half an hour had not elapsed since the king and Madame Henrietta had left each other to allow him to presume that the thousand things in question were a continuation of the three thousand they had said during the ride from Versailles to Fontenay-le-Comte.

Therefore the confused wording of the note and the post-person gave the king much to reflect upon.

He made some slight change in his dress and then went to pay a visit to Madame.

The princess, who had not wished to appear to be expecting him, had gone down into the gardens with an her Indian.

When the king was informed that Madame had left her apartment to take a walk, he accompanied all the gentlemen he could find at hand and directed them to follow him to the garden.

Madame was hunting butterflies on a large grass-plot bordered with hawthorns and hedges.

She was observing the most intrepid and youngest of her ladies as they were chasing round, and with her back turned towards an avenue of limes trees was impatiently awaiting the arrival of the king to whom she had given this rendezvous.

The ascending of several steps upon the grass-plot caused her to turn round. Louis XIV. was uncovered, he had struck down with his cane a small peasant butterfly, which M. de Saint-Anguen had picked up from the grass.

"You see, Madame," said the king, "that I also am hunting for you."

And he approached her.

"Gentlemen," said he, turning to the gentlemen who formed his suite, "each of you do as much and take them to those ladies."

This was dismissing them all.

Then was seen a very singular creature, and sometimes, when courtiers, running after butterflies, losing their

hats, and charging with raised canes the myrtle bushes and hedges, as if they were attacking a Spanish army.

The king offered his hand to Madame, and with her selected as a central point of observation a bench over which was raised a mossy roof, a sort of chalet rudely formed by the twisted branches of some gardeners, who had introduced the picturesque and fantastic and too severe style of gardening of those days.

This pavilion, around which were trained nasturtiums and creeping rose-trees, formed a shade over a bench to which there was no back, so that spectators seated in the very centre of the grass-plot could see and be seen from all sides, but could not be overheard without perceiving those who might approach to listen to them.

From this seat, on which the two interested parties placed themselves, the king gave an encouraging sign to the butterfly-hunters, and then as if he were conversing with Madame on the butterfly which he had transfixed with a gold pin to his hat.

"Are we not in a good position here for conversation?" said he.

"Yes, sire, for it was necessary that I should be heard by you alone and seen by all the world."

"And that is my case," said Louis.

"My note surprised you?"

"Terrified me. But what I have to say to you is more important."

"Oh! that cannot be. Do you know that Monsieur has closed his doors upon me?"

"On you! and for what reason?"

"Cannot you divine it?"

"Ah! Madame! but then we have exact precisely the same thing to relate."

"What then has happened to you?"

"You wish me to begin—"

"Yes; for I have told you all."

"It is my turn then. Know then that on my return I met my mother, who took me to her apartment."

"And the queen-mother?" cried Madame, anxiously. "That is serious."

"Oh! it is so indeed. This is what she said.—But first of all allow me a preamble."

"Speak, sire."

"Did Monsieur ever speak to you of me?"

"Often."

"Has he spoken to you of his jealousy?"

"Often still."

"With regard to me?"

"Oh! no, but with regard to—"

"Yes, I know—to Buckingham and Guiche."

"Precisely."

"Well, Madame, Monsieur has now taken it into his head to be jealous of me."

"Only see that!" replied the princess, smiling cunningly.

"At all events, it appears to me that we have not given occasion for—"

"Never! I at least,—but how have you been informed of Monsieur's jealousy?"

"My mother stated to me that Monsieur entered her room perfectly furious, that he had vented a thousand complaints against your—but pray pardon me."

"Say on, say on."

"Against your coquetry. It appears that Monsieur can also be unjust."

"You are too good, sire."

"My mother sought to reassure him; but he said he had been reassured too often, and that he would no longer be blanded."

"Would he not have done much better had he never made himself uneasy?"

"That is just what I said."

"Acknowledge, sire, that the world is very wicked. What! a brother, a sister cannot converse together, feel pleasure in each other's society, without giving rise to comments, to suspicions. For, in short, sire, we have done no harm, we have not even the slightest desire to do harm."

And she looked at the king with that proud and provocative eye, which ignites the flame of desire even in the most frigid and the wisest.

"No; that is true," sighed Louis.

"Do you know, sire, that should this continue I shall be compelled to come to a rupture. Come now, let us examine our conduct. Is it, or is it not correct?"

"Oh! certes, quite correct."

"Only that we often take pleasure in the same pursuits; we might have gone astray and committed evil, but have we done so? To me, you are a brother and nothing more."

The king knitted his brow; she continued—

"Your hand, which often meets mine, does not produce in me that thrill, that emotion which lovers feel—"

"Oh! enough! enough! I conjure you say not another word!" cried the

king, much agitated "You are pitiless, and will absolutely destroy me."

"Why so?"

"You tell me, in short, that you have no feeling for me."

"Oh! sire—I do not say that—my affection—"

"Henrietta!—enough!—again I conjure you—if you believe that I am of marble like yourself—you must be undeceived."

"I do not understand you."

"'Tis well!" exclaimed the king, casting down his eyes. "Thus our meetings, our clasping each other's hands, our mutual looks—pardon, pardon—yes, you are right, and I know what you would say."

He hid his face with his hands.

"Take care, sire," said Madame earnestly, "M. de Saint Aignan is looking at you."

"That is true," cried Louis, with furious anger, "we have never even the shadow of liberty—no sincerity in our intercourse—we think we have found a friend, and he is merely a spy upon our actions—a sincere female friend, and we have only a sister."

"Monsieur is jealous!" murmured Madame in an accent, the charm and sweetness of which no pen can describe.

"Oh!" suddenly ejaculated the king, "you are right."

"You acknowledge that," she replied, with a look that struck to his heart. "You are free; no one suspects you—the joys of your family circle are not poisoned."

"Alas! you do not know then that the queen is jealous."

"Marie Therese!"

"Even to madness. Monsieur's jealousy has sprung from hers; she was weeping, was complaining to my mother; she was reproaching me with regard to our bathing parties—so delightful to me."

"To me," responded the eyes of Madame.

"Suddenly Monsieur, who was listening, heard the queen pronounce, with much bitterness, the word banos; that opened his eyes; he entered the room much agitated; entered into discussion, and quarrelled so harshly with my mother, that she was compelled to fly his presence; so that you have to encounter a jealous husband, and I shall have rising up before me perpetually and inexorably the spectre of jealousy, with its swollen eyes, meager cheeks, and pursed up lips."

"Poor king!" murmured Madame, letting her hand fall so that it touched that of Louis.

He clasped that hand, and, in order to retain it without exciting the suspicion of the spectators, who were not so eagerly engaged in hunting for butterflies as they were in seeking for information as to the mysterious nature of this conversation between the king and Madame—Louis pretending to be pointing out to her the beauties of the expiring butterfly; both were leaning forward, as if to count the thousand eyes upon its wings, or the grains of their golden dust.

Only neither of them said a word; their heads nearly touched; their breath mingled; their hands burned one within the other. Five minutes thus elapsed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT IS CAUGHT WHEN HUNTING AFTER BUTTERFLIES.

THE youthful couple, after remaining with their heads thus inclined, under the influence of a new-born passion, the path of which to imaginations so ardent and so youthful, appears to be strewn with flowers.

Madame Henrietta glanced furtively at Louis. Hers was one of those well-organized natures which can at once investigate their own minds and those of others. She saw love in the depths of the heart of Louis, as a skilful diver sees the pearl in the depths of the ocean.

She comprehended that Louis was either hesitating or in doubt, and that it was necessary to urge on this indolent or timid heart.

"Thus," said she—interrogating at the same moment that she broke this silence—

"What would you say?" inquired Louis, after waiting a moment for her to conclude the question.

"I mean to say that I shall be compelled to return to the resolution which I had taken, which I had already submitted to your majesty."

"And when was that?"

"The day on which we had the explanation with regard to the jealousy of Monsieur."

"What was it, then, that you said to me on that day?" anxiously demanded Louis.

"You no longer recollect it, sire?"

"Alas! if it is another misfortune I shall remember it soon enough."

"Oh! it is to me only that it is a misfortune, but 'tis a constrained misfortune."

"Gracious heaven!"

"And I will submit to it."

"In fine, tell me, what is this misfortune?"

"Absence."

"Oh! once more that cruel determination."

"Sire, believe me that I have not formed it without a violent struggle against my own feelings. Sire, believe me, I must return to England."

"Oh! never, never will I permit you to leave France."

"And yet," said Madame affecting a tender and sorrowful firmness, "and yet, sire, nothing can be more urgent, and there is more than this; for such I am persuaded is the will of your mother."

"The will! exclaimed the king," oh! oh! dear sister, you have let fall a strange word, as addressed to me."

"But," replied Madame Henrietta, smiling, "are you not happy in submitting to the will of a good mother?"

"No more, I conjure you—you are tearing my heart."

"Who—I?"

"Undoubtedly; you speak of this departure with a calmness—"

"I was not born to be happy," replied the princess in a most melancholy tone, "and I was taught when very young to accustom myself to seeing my dearest wishes thwarted."

"Are those your true feelings, and would your departure thwart a single idea that is dear to you?"

"Were I to answer, yes, is it not true, sire, that you would soon patiently submit to it?"

"Cruel Henrietta!"

"Take care, sire, some one is approaching."

The king looked all around him.

"No," said he, "there is no one."

Then turning again to Madame.

"Let us see, Henrietta, whether instead of endeavoring to combat the jealousy of Monsieur by a departure which would kill me—"

Henrietta slightly raised her shoulder as if she doubted the assertion.

"Yes, which would kill me," earnestly reiterated Louis. "Come now, instead of determining on this departure, can not your imagination or rather, could not your heart suggest some means?"

"And, good heaven! what would you have my heart suggest?"

"But in short, tell me, how can it be proved to any one that he is wrong in being jealous?"

"First of all, sire, by not giving him any motive to be jealous, by loving him only."

"Oh! I expected something better than that."

"What did you expect?"

"That you would simply say that the jealous can be tranquillized by concealing the affection which one bears to the object of which they are jealous."

"To conceal is difficult, sire."

"It is by overcoming difficulties that all happiness can be attained. As to myself, I swear to you, that I will outwit those who are jealous of me by putting them off the track, and that I will conduct myself towards you as I do to all other women."

"A bad method, a feeble method," said the princess shaking her charming head.

"You deem every thing bad, dear Henrietta," cried Louis discontentedly, "you object to every plan, that I propose. At all events suggest something in place of them. Come now, try to discover a means. I have a great idea of the inventive faculty of women; invent something in your turn."

"Well! I have discovered something; are you listening to me, sire?"

"Can you ask such a question? You are speaking of life or death to me, and you ask me if I am listening."

"Well, then, I am judging from myself. If it were necessary to deceive me as to the intentions of my husband with regard to another woman, there is one thing which would re-assure me more than all."

"And what is that?"

"It would in the first instance be that he did not pay any attention to that woman."

"Well, that is precisely what I was saying to you just now."

"Be it so. But in order to be fully assured of it, I should require to see him paying attention to another."

"Ah! now I understand you," replied Louis, smiling. "But tell me, dear Henrietta."

"What?"

"Although the means may be ingenious it would be scarcely charitable."

"And why so?"

"By curing the apprehension of a wound in the mind of the jealous person you inflict one on his heart. He has no longer a dread of it, 'tis true, but the real evil exists and that to me seems worse."

"Agreed; but at all events he does not surprise, he does not even suspect the real enemy, he does not thwart his love; he concentrates all his powers and directs them to a point where they can injure nothing nor any person. In a word, sire, my system which I am surprised to find that you contend against, I acknowledge is prejudicial to the jealous but favorable to the lovers. Therefore, I ask, I ask you, sire, whether, with the exception of yourself perhaps, who have never thought of pitying the jealous, they are not melancholy animals who are always as unhappy without having any cause for it as when they have one; take away the subject and you do not even cure their affliction. Their malady has its rise in their imagination, and like all imaginary maladies, it is incurable. But stay, this brings to my mind, my dear sire, an aphorism of my poor physician, Dr. Dawley, a learned and intellectual man, who, had it not been for my brother who cannot exist without him, would now be here with me. 'When you suffer from two afflictions,' would he say to me, 'choose that which is the least inconvenient to you, and I will leave it to you, for by heaven!' said he, 'it would be very useful to me in assisting me to extirpate the other.'"

"Well said, well judged, dear Henrietta," replied the king, smiling.

"Oh! we have some very skilful people in London, sire."

"And those skilful people have admirable pupils; this Daley, Darley, what was it you called him?"

"Dawley."

"Well, to-morrow I will assign him a pension for his aphorism. And you, Henrietta, begin by choosing the least inconvenient of your evils. You do not answer me. You smile. I guess your thoughts. Your least evil is that of remaining in France, is it not? I will leave you that evil, and to commence the cure of the other, I will this very day seek a subject which shall divest the suspicions of the jealous of both sexes who persecute us."

"Hush! some one is really coming this time," said Madame.

And she stooped down to gather a periwinkle growing among the mossy grass.

Madame was perfectly right, for a troop of young women rushed to the summit of the small mound, followed by the gentlemen. The cause of this grand irruption was a magnificent sphinx butterfly, whose upper wings were similar in color to the plumage of the screech-owl, while the under ones were of a beautiful rose color.

This grand prey had been taken in the net of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, who showed him with much pride to her rivals less skilful in the chase than she had been.

The queen of the hunt seated herself at a distance of about twenty paces from the bench on which Louis and Madame Henrietta were sitting, leaning against a magnificent oak entwined with ivy, and pinned the butterfly on the end of her long cane.

Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente was very beautiful, and consequently the men deserted the other ladies, under the pretext of complimenting her upon her skill, and formed a circle around her.

The king and the princess looked contemptuously on this scene, like the spectators of advanced age when observing the games of children.

"They are amusing themselves yonder," said the king.

"Very much, sire; I have always remarked that people amuse themselves where there is youth and beauty."

"What do you say of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, Henrietta?" said the king.

"Why that she is rather too fair," replied Madame, falling at once upon the only defect which could be remarked in the beauty, almost perfect, of the future Madame de Montespan.

"Rather fair, it may be so; but handsome notwithstanding that."

"Is that your opinion, sire?"

"Why, yes."

"Well, then, it is mine also."

"And much sought after you see."

"Oh! there can be no doubt of that. Lovers are always flitting round. If we were hunting for lovers, instead of hunting for butterflies, what a magnificent catch we could make around her."

"Come now, Henrietta, supposing the king were to mingle with all those lovers, and allow his eyes to fall in that direction, would they still be jealous down yonder?"

"Oh! sire, Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente would be a very efficacious remedy," said Madame, with a sigh; "she would cure the jealous man, undoubtedly, but she might render a woman jealous."

"Henrietta! Henrietta!" exclaimed the king, "you transport my heart with joy. Yes, yes, you are right. Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente is too handsome to serve as a cloak."

"A king's cloak," replied Madame smiling, "a king's cloak ought to be handsome."

"Do you advise it then?" asked Louis.

"Oh! what shall I say to you, sire, if not that did I so advise it would be giving arms against myself. It would be either madness or pride to counsel you to adopt as the heroine of a pretended love a woman more beautiful than her, for whom you pretend to have formed a sincere affection."

The king sought Madame's hand with his, her eyes with his eyes, then he stammered out a few words so tender, but pronounced in so low a voice, that the historian, who ought to hear every thing, did not catch them.

Then aloud:

"Well," said he, "do you yourself select the one who is to cure our two jealous persecutors. To her will I address every care, all my attentions. All the time which I can steal from public affairs shall be devoted to her; the flower which I shall gather for you, the tender thoughts to which you may give rise, for her will be the lock which I shall not dare address to you, and which ought to rouse you from your indifference. But select her well, for fear that in attempting to look upon her, for fear that when wishing to think of her, for fear that when offering her the rose gathered with my own hand I may find myself so subjugated by you that my eyes, my hands, my lips, shall instantly fly back to you, even should the whole universe divine my secret."

While these words were escaping the king's lips, like a chaplet of love, Madame was blushing and palpitating, happy, proud, enchanted. She could not find words to reply. Her pride and her thirst for admiration were satisfied.

"I will choose for you," she said, raising her fine eyes, "but not as you have requested, for all this incense which you wish to burn on the altar of another goddess, I also am jealous

of it, and it is my will that it should all return to me without losing even an atom of it on the way. Therefore, sire, I will, with your royal permission, select the one which shall appear to me the least capable of distracting your attention, and who shall leave my image intact within your heart."

"Fortunately," said the king, "your court is not ill-chosen, otherwise I should tremble at the threat you have just uttered. We have taken good precautions on this head, and around you, as around me, it would be difficult to find an ill-favored face."

During the time the king was thus speaking Madame had risen, and had with her eyes searched round the grass-plot, and after a minute and silent examination called the king to her.

"See, sire," said she, "do you observe, on the rising of the hill yonder, near that clump of snow-balls, that tardy belle who is walking alone, with cast down head and listless arms, gazing upon the grass which she is treading down, like one lost in thought?"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said the king.

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"Will she not suit you, sire?"

"Why, see you, the poor child is thin, almost a skeleton."

"Good! am I so stout then?"

"But she is as melancholy as a mermaid."

"The greater contrast then with me, for I am accused of being too lively."

"But she limps!"

"Do you think so?"

"Undoubtedly; she has allowed them all to pass her, fearing that her misfortune may be observed."

"Well, then, she will run less swiftly than Daphne, and will not be able to escape Apollo."

"Henrietta! Henrietta!" cried the king, with some degree of vexation, "you have sought out for me the most defective among your maids of honor."

"Yes, but she is one of my maids of honor—pray note that."

"Undoubtedly; but what do you mean to say?"

"I mean that in order to visit this new divinity you cannot avoid coming to my apartments, and that decency interdicting you from conversing privately with the goddess, you will be constrained to see her only in my

circle, and to speak to me when speaking to her. I mean, in short, that our jealous friends will be wrong if they believe that you visit me for my self, since you will do so on account of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Who limps."

"Almost imperceptibly."

"Who never opens her lips."

"But who, when she does open them, shows the most beautiful set of teeth."

"Who might serve as a model for osteologists."

"Your favor will fatten her."

"Henrietta!"

"In fine, you left the choice to me?"

"Alas! yes."

"Well then! she is my choice; I impose it on you; you must submit to it."

"Oh! I would submit even to one of the furies, should you insist upon it."

"La Vallière is gentle as a lamb. Do not fear that she will ever contradict you when you tell her that you love her."

And Madame laughed heartily.

"Oh! you are not alarmed that I shall tell her so too fervently; is it not so?"

"I have only exercised my right."

"Be it so."

"The treaty then is concluded?"

"Signed."

"You will retain for me the friendship of a brother; the assiduity of a brother, the gallantry of a king, will you not?"

"I will retain for you a heart which has already acquired the habit of beating only at your command."

"Well, do you feel that the future is insured by this arrangement?"

"I hope so."

"Will your mother cease to regard me as an enemy?"

"Yes."

"Will Marie Therese cease to speak in Spanish before Monsieur, who has a perfect horror of colloquies in a foreign language, because he always believes that people are speaking ill of him?"

"Alas! and is he in the wrong," murmured the king tenderly.

"And, to conclude," said the princess, "will the king still be accused of entertaining an illegitimate affection when the truth is that we can only entertain towards each other sympathies which are pure and devoid of every evil thought."

"Yes, yes," said the king. "But they will say more than that."

"And what will they say, sire?" In good earnest then we shall never enjoy tranquillity."

"It will be said," continued the king, "that I have very bad taste, but what is my self-love in comparison with your tranquillity?"

"With my honor, sire, and that of our family you would say. Moreover, believe me, you should not thus hurriedly take such a prejudice against la Vallière; she limps, it is true, but she is not deficient in good sense. Besides, all that the king touches becomes gold."

"In fine, Madame, be assured of one thing, and that is, that I am still grateful to you; you might have made me pay still more dearly for your sojourn in France."

"Sire, they are coming towards us."

"Well?"

"A last word."

"What is it?"

"You are prudent and wise, sire, but in this matter you must summon to your aid, all your prudence, all your wisdom."

"Oh!" cried Louis, laughing, "I shall this very evening begin to act my part, and you shall see whether I have a true vocation for that of an amorous shepherd. We are to have a grand promenade in the wood after the collation, and then we have supper and the ballet at ten o'clock."

"I know that well."

"Oh! my flame will this evening burst forth higher than the fire-works, shine more brilliant than the lamps of our friend Colbert; it will be so resplendent that Monsieur and the two queens will have their eyes completely dazzled by it."

"Take care, sire, take care!"

"Why, good heaven! what have I done?"

"I shall be compelled to retract the compliments I just now paid you—You prudent! you wise!—Why you are commencing by the most abominable follies! Can a passion be thus suddenly ignited, like a torch, in a second? And without the slightest preparation, can a king formed as you are, at once fall at the feet of a girl like la Vallière?"

"Oh! Henrietta! Henrietta! Henrietta! now I have caught you.—We have not yet begun our campaign and you are pillaging me already!"

"By no means; but I recall you to reasonable ideas. Let your flame burn forth progressively, instead of allowing it to burst out so suddenly. Jupiter thunders and darts his lightnings before he sets fire to palaces. Every thing has its prelude. If you appear to be so suddenly inflamed, no one will believe you, or all the world will think you mad, unless indeed they should divine your motives. People are less stupid than they sometimes appear to be."

The king was obliged to confess that Madame was an angel in wisdom, and a demon in wit.

He bowed.

"Well! be it so," said he, "I will conclude my plan of attack. Generals, my cousin of Condé, for instance, turn pale over their maps of operations before they order the movements of one of those pawns which are called divisions of an army; and therefore will I draw up a regular plan of attack. You know that the Tender, is divided into all sorts of circumscriptions. Well! I will halt at the village of Trifling-Attentions, at the hamlet of Love-Letters, before taking the road to Visible-Love—the way, as you know, is perfectly traced out—and poor Mademoiselle de Scudery would never forgive me, if I should pass over any of the stages."

"Ah! we have got into the good road again. Would it please you that we should now separate?"

"Alas! it must be so; for see, they are coming to separate us."

"Ah! yes," said Madame Henrietta, "for they are bringing Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente's sphinx, in triumph with the sound of horns as used by the masters of the hunt."

"It is then clearly understood, that this evening during the promenade, I will step into the forest, and there finding la Vallière without you—"

"I will send her—that is my affair."

"Very well! I will accost her in the midst of her companions, and then let fly my first dart."

"Beskiful," said Madame, laughing, "and do not miss her heart."

And the princess took leave of the king to meet the joyous troupe who were advancing with fantastic ceremonies and hunting flourishes, echoed by every mouth.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BALLET OF "THE SEASONS."

AFTER the collation, which was served at about five o'clock, the king went into his cabinet, where his tailors were waiting for him.

The matter in question was to try on the famous costume of Spring, which had cost so much imagination, so many efforts of thought to the designers and the furnishers of the court.

As to the ballet itself, every body knew their dances and their parts. The king had resolved to make it the object of a surprise.

And therefore he had scarcely terminated his conference, and had returned to his own room, when he sent for his two masters of the ceremonies, Villeroy and Saint Aignan.

They both replied that they awaited but his orders, that every thing was in readiness to begin, but to give this order it was first necessary to feel assured that the weather would be fine and the night propitious.

The king opened a window ; a shower of golden dust seemed to be falling on the horizon as seen through the avenues of the wood ; white as driven snow the moon was rising in the sky.

There was not a ripple on the surface of the water, green from the reflection of the foliage, the swans themselves reposing with closed wings like vessels at anchor, seemed tranquillized by the heat of the atmosphere, the freshness of the water, and the silence of the lovely evening.

The king having observed all this, and contemplated the beauty of this magnificent spectacle, gave the order which Messieurs de Villeroy and de Saint Aignan were awaiting.

That this order should be royally executed, a last question was essential. Louis XIV. addressed it to his two gentlemen.

The question consisted of only four words.

"Have you sufficient money?"

"Sire," replied Saint Aignan, "we have arranged every thing with M. Colbert."

"Ah! very well."

"Yes, sire ; and M. Colbert told us that he would be in attendance on your majesty as soon as your majesty should manifest the intention of proceeding

with the festivities of which you had given the programme."

"Let him come then."

As if Colbert had been listening at the door to inform himself of the result of the conversation, he entered the room as soon as the king had pronounced his name to the two courtiers.

"Ah! very well, M. Colbert," said his majesty ; "to your posts then, gentlemen."

Saint Aignan and Villeroy withdrew.

The king threw himself into an arm-chair near the window.

"My ballet is to be performed this evening, Monsieur Colbert," said he.

"Then to-morrow, sire, I must pay the accounts."

"How so?"

"I promised the contractors to settle their accounts the day after the ballet should take place."

"Be it so, Monsieur Colbert, as you have promised, pay them."

"Tis very well, sire ; but in order to pay as M. de Lesdiguières said, we must have money."

"What! the four millions promised by M. Fouquet, have they not then been paid? I had forgotten to ask you that."

"Sire, they were brought to your majesty at the appointed hour."

"Well then?"

"Well, sire, the colored lamps, the fire-works, the musicians, and all the kitchens have devoured four millions in eight days."

"What, the whole sum?"

"Even to the last sou. Every time your majesty ordered the banks of the canal to be illuminated, there was as much oil burned as there was water in it."

"Well, very well, Monsieur Colbert. In short, you have no more money."

"Oh! I have no more, sire, but M. Fouquet has some."

And the countenance of Colbert was illuminated by a sinister expression.

"What would you say?" inquired the king.

"Sire, we have already made M. Fouquet give six millions. He gave them with too good a grace not to give more should it be necessary. It is now necessary, therefore he must advance it."

The king frowned.

"Monsieur Colbert," said he, accentuating every syllable, "it is not thus

I understand it; I will not employ against one of my servants means of pressure which would inconvenience him, and which would embarrass his affairs. M. Fouquet has given six millions in eight days, and that is a large sum."

Colbert turned pale.

"And yet," said he, "your majesty did not use this language some little time ago; for instance, when the news with regard to Belle-Isle arrived."

"You are right, Monsieur Colbert."

"Nothing has changed since then, but on the contrary—"

"In my mind, sir, every thing has changed."

"How, sire! Your majesty no longer believes in the attempts?"

"My affairs concern me solely, M. Sub-intendent, and I have already told you that I attend to them myself."

"Then I see that I have had the misfortune," said Colbert, trembling with rage and fear, "to incur your majesty's displeasure."

"In no way; on the contrary you are very agreeable to me."

"Ah! sire," said the minister, with that affected abruptness which was so successful when it was necessary to flatter the self-love of the king, "of what avail is it to be agreeable to your majesty when one is not useful?"

"I reserve your services for a better opportunity, and believe me they will not then be the less valuable."

"Therefore, your majesty's plan with regard to this affair—"

"You are in want of money, Monsieur Colbert?"

"Of seven hundred thousand livres, sire."

"You will take them from my private treasury."

Colbert bowed.

"And," added Louis, "as it appears to me that it will be difficult, notwithstanding your economy, for you to be able to satisfy with so small a sum the expenses I am about to go into, I will sign you an order for three millions."

The king took a pen, and immediately wrote the order. He then handed the paper to Colbert.

"Make yourself easy," said he, "the plan I have adopted is the plan of a king, Monsieur Colbert."

And with these words, pronounced with all the majesty which the young prince knew how to assume in serious circumstances, he dismissed Colbert to give audience to his tailor.

The order given by the king was soon known throughout Fontainebleau; it was known that the king had tried on his dress, and that the ballet was to be danced that evening.

The news fled with the rapidity of lightning, and as it spread it ignited every coquetry, every desire, every extravagant ambition.

In an instant, and as if by enchantment, all who could hold a needle, all that could distinguish doublet from hose, as Molière says, were convoked to lend their aid to the fashionables and ladies of the court.

The king had completed his toilette at nine o'clock; he appeared in an open carriage, ornamented with foliage and flowers.

The queens had taken their seats under a canopy raised on the margin of the lake, in a theatre of marvellous elegance.

In five hours the carpenters had fitted together all the parts of this theatre, which had been previously prepared; the upholsterers had spread their tapestry, arranged the seats, and as by the signal of a magic wand, a thousand arms, aiding each other, had constructed the edifice to the sound of music, while the artificers illuminated the theatre and the borders of the lake with an incalculable number of wax lights.

As the heavens sparkled with stars, there being not a cloud to dim them, as not a breath of wind stirred the leaves of the extensive forest, all nature seeming to accommodate itself to the desires of the young prince. The end of the stage had not been inclosed. So that beyond the scenic decorations could be perceived the azure heaven, streaming with stars, the sheet of water illuminated by the thousand lights reflected in it, and the blue outline of the forest, with its rounded summits.

When the king appeared the whole theatre was crowded, and presented a group sparkling with precious stones and gold, among which at the first glance not a single countenance could be distinguished.

But by degrees, as the eye became accustomed to the glare, the most lovely faces appeared like stars in the evening sky, and one by one, to the admiring gazer who closes his eyes for a moment and then again opens them.

The scene represented a wood; a few fawns, raising their hooved feet, were bounding here and there; a dryad

appearing excited their pursuit; others soon joined her to defend her, and a contention ensued between them all while dancing.

Suddenly Spring was to appear, accompanied by all his court, to restore peace and order.

The Elements, the subaltern mythologic powers, with their attributes, hurried on to follow the steps of their gracious sovereign.

The Seasons, the allies of Spring, accompanied him, forming a quadrille, when after a few words more or less flattering, the dance commenced. The music, hautboys, flutes and violins, played airs descriptive of pastoral pleasures.

The king entered amid thunders of applause.

He was attired in a flowered tunic, which well developed his well-formed and flexible person. His legs, among the most elegant of the court, appeared to advantage in flesh-colored silk stockings, the silk of which was so fine and so transparent that they might have been imagined flesh itself.

The most beautiful shoes, of light lilac satin, with rosettes of satin, inclosed his remarkably small feet.

The bust was in perfect harmony with the rest, fine waving hair, an air of freshness enhanced by the brilliancy of his blue eyes, which gently inflamed all hearts; a mouth with inviting lips, which opened but to smile. Such was the prince who on that evening might justly have been entitled the king of all the loves.

In his deportment there was something of the airy majesty of a god. He did not dance, he seemed to hover in the air.

His entrance produced the most brilliant effect. Suddenly the Count de Saint-Aignan was perceived endeavoring to approach the king and Madame.

The princess, dressed in a long diaphanous robe, fine as the tissues worked by the skilful Milanese, her knee sometimes prominent beneath the folds of the tunic, her small feet encased in silver slippers, advanced radiantly with her troop of nymphs, and had already reached the place assigned to her in the dance.

The applause continued for so long a time that the count had no difficulty in approaching his majesty.

"What is the matter, Saint-Aignan?" said Spring to him.

"Oh! sire," replied the courtier, his

countenance pale and agitated, "your majesty has not thought of the Fruit dance."

"Oh! yes; it is suppressed."

"By no means, sire. Your majesty gave no order respecting it, and it is retained in the music."

"This is vexatious," said the king "It cannot be performed, because M. de Guiche is absent. It must be suppressed."

"Oh! sire, a quarter of an hour's music without dancing would kill the ballet."

"But, count, the—"

"Oh! sire, that would not be a very great misfortune, after all, for the orchestra could manage to leave it out should it be necessary, but—"

"But what?"

"Why, M. de Guiche is here."

"Here!" replied the king, knitting his brows, "here! are you sure of that?"

"And ready dressed for the ballet, sire."

The king felt the color rising to his forehead.

"You must be mistaken," said he.

"So little, sire, that your majesty can see him by turning to the right. The count is waiting."

Louis eagerly turned round, and in fact at a short distance from him, saw Guiche standing, beaming with youth and beauty, dressed as Vertumnus. The count was waiting till the king should look upon him to address him.

To describe the stupefaction of the king, that of Monsieur, who seemed violently agitated, the murmur of whispers and the movements of the heads of the spectators throughout the theatre, the strange effect produced upon Madame by the sudden apparition of her partner, is a task we must leave to a more skilful pen.

The king had remained open mouthed, and looking at the count.

The latter, respectfully and lowly bending as he approached, drew near the king.

"Sire," said he, "the most humble of your majesty's subjects comes to do him service on this day, as he has done on days of battle. The king, in losing the Fruit dance, lost the finest scene of his whole ballet. I was not willing that such an injury should be inflicted by me to the great skill, gracefulness, and beautiful imagination evinced by the king in his ballet; I have left my

farmers in order to come to the aid of my prince."

Each of these words fell harmonious and eloquent upon the ear of Louis XIV. The flattery pleased him as much as the daring courage astounded him. He merely replied,

"I did not tell you to return, count."

"Assuredly, sire; but your majesty did not tell me that I was to remain."

The king felt that time was hurrying on. This scene, should it be prolonged, might confuse every thing. A single shadow cast over this festival would inevitably spoil all.

The heart of the king moreover was overflowing with kindly feelings; he had just had a new idea instilled into his mind by the eloquent eyes of Madame.

Henrietta's eyes had conveyed almost as clearly as language could have expressed them, the following words,

"Since people are jealous of you, let their suspicions be divided; who is mistrustful of two rivals is mistrustful of neither."

By this skilful diversion, Madame at once removed every difficulty.

The king smiled on Guiche.

Guiche did not comprehend a word of the mute language of Madame. All that he perceived was that she affected not to look at him. His having obtained his pardon he attributed to the kind heart of the princess. The king appeared pleased with every body.

Monsieur alone could not understand a word of the whole matter.

The ballet began; it was splendid.

When the music had animated by its inspiring sounds the efforts of these illustrious dancers, when the primitive description of the pantomime of that era, rendered still more primitive by the very mediocre enthusiasm of the august players, had attained its acme, the applause of the spectators shook the theatre to its foundations.

Guiche was brilliant as a sun, but as a courtier sun, who submits to playing the second part.

Disdainful of this success, for which Madame testified no sort of gratitude, he thought only of bravely re-conquering the preference of the princess.

She did not bestow a single look upon him.

By degrees, all his joyousness, all his brilliancy was extinguished by grief and anxiety, so that his legs became listless, his arms heavy, his head distracted.

The king, from that moment, was in reality the best dancer in the quadrille.

He cast a glance towards his conquered rival.

Guiche was no longer even a courtier; he danced badly and without adulation; soon he did not dance at all.

The king and Madame triumphed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE NYMPHS OF FONTAINEBLEAU PARK.

THE king remained for an instant to enjoy his triumph, which we have said was as complete as possible.

Then he turned towards Madame to admire her a little in his turn.

Young people love perhaps with more vivacity, more ardor, more passion than persons of maturer years, but they have all the other feelings developed in proportion to their youth and vigor, so that self-love being always in them an equivalent to love, this last feeling counterpoised by the former, never attains the same degree of intensity which it acquires in men and women of from thirty to thirty-five years of age.

Louis thought therefore of Madame, but after having thought much more of himself, and Madame thought of herself, perhaps without thinking in the slightest degree of the king.

But the victim amid all this royal love and self-love was de Guiche.

And therefore all the world could remark both the agitation and the prostration of the unhappy nobleman, and this prostration was so much the more remarkable, that they were not accustomed to seeing him thus, with arms hanging listlessly, his head bent down upon his chest, his eyes devoid of animation, they were not accustomed to feeling any anxiety with regard to him in matters that related to elegance or taste.

The greater number of the spectators attributed de Guiche's defeat to his address as a courtier.

But others also, for there are clear seeing eyes at court, others remarked his paleness and his utter depression, a paleness and depression he could neither feign nor conceal, and they concluded from it, and rightly too, that Guiche was not playing an assumed part from adulation.

These sufferings, these successes,

these commentaries were overwhelmed, confounded, lost, amid the whirlwind of applause.

But when the queens had testified their satisfaction, the spectators their enthusiasm, when the king had retired to his box to change his dress while Monsieur attired as a woman which was his custom, was dancing in his turn, Guiche having somewhat recovered his self-possession, approached Madame, who, seated at the back of the stage, awaited her second entrance, and had created for herself a solitude amid the crowd, as if studying her choreographic poses.

It will be understood that being occupied by such serious meditations she did not see, or affected not to see any thing that was passing around her.

Guiche, therefore, finding her alone near a shady bower, of painted canvas, approached Madame.

Two of her maids of honor attired as Hamadryades, seeing Guiche draw near, withdrew from respect.

Guiche therefore advanced to the centre of the circle and bowed to her royal highness.

But her royal highness whether she had remarked or not this salutation, did not turn her head.

A tremor shot through the veins of the unhappy man, he did not expect to be received with such complete indifference; he, who had seen nothing, who had been informed of nothing, and consequently could not divine the actual state of matters between Madame and the king.

Finding that his salutation was not noticed, he advanced a step further, and in a voice which he vainly endeavored to render calm,

"I have the honor," said he, "to present my humble respects to Madame."

This time her royal highness deigned to turn her languishing eyes towards the count.

"Ah! it is you, Monsieur de Guiche!" said she, "good day."

And she turned away from him.

De Guiche's patience was nearly failing him.

"Your royal highness danced most enchantingly just now," said he.

"You think so," negligently replied Madame.

"Yes the part is one that altogether suits the character of your royal highness."

Madame turned completely round

and gazing at Guiche with a fixed and penetrating look.

"And how so?" said she.

"It does so undoubtedly."

"Explain yourself."

"You represent a beautiful, disdainful and fickle goddess," said he.

"You are speaking of Pomona, my lord count."

"I speak of the goddess your royal highness personates."

Madame remained silent for a moment, her lips compressed.

"But yourself, sir, are you not also a perfect dancer?" said she.

"Oh! as to me, Madame, I am of those who pass unnoticed, and who are soon forgotten, if by chance they have been noticed."

And saying these words which were accompanied by one of those deep sighs that cause every fibre in the frame to tremble, with a heart palpitating and replete with anguish, his brain on fire, his eyes wandering, he bowed and withdrew behind the canvas scene.

Madame's only reply was a slight raising of her shoulders.

And as her maids of honor, as we have said, had discreetly retired during this colloquy, she summoned them again by a look.

They were Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente and de Montalais. They both hastened to obey the signal from Madame.

"Did you hear, mesdemoiselles," inquired the princess.

"What, madam?"

"What the Count de Guiche said?"

"No."

"Really it is a most remarkable thing," said the princess in a compassionate tone, "how much this exile has fatigued the mind of this poor M. de Guiche."

And still louder that the unfortunate man might not lose a single word, she said,

"He danced badly, in the first place," she continued, "and afterwards he uttered only puerilities."

Then she arose humming the air to which she was about to dance.

Guiche had heard all; the dart had penetrated to the depths of his heart, and lacerated it.

And then at the risk of destroying the whole order of the entertainment by his vexation he fled, tearing his beautiful dress as Vertumnus to ribands, and strewing in his path, the garlands of vine leaves, mulberry and almond

leaves with all the little artificial attributes of his divinity.

A quarter of an hour elapsed before he returned to the theatre, but it could be easily understood, that nothing but a powerful struggle of reason against madness could have brought him back, or perhaps his heart was so constituted, that he felt it impossible to remain absent any longer from her who had broken it.

Madame was finishing her *pas seul*.

She saw him, but she did not look at him, and he, irritated and furious at her conduct, turned his back upon her as she passed by him escorted by her nymphs and followed by a hundred flatterers.

During this time, and at the other end of the stage near the lake, was seated a young lady, with her eyes fixed on one of the windows of the theatre.

From that window shone forth a flood of light.

It was the window of the royal box.

Guiche on leaving the theatre, on going out to inhale the fresh air which he so much needed, passed close by this lady, and bowed to her.

She, on her side, on perceiving the young man, had risen, as if she had been surprised indulging in ideas she had wished to conceal, even from herself.

Guiche recognized her, and immediately stopped.

"Good evening, mademoiselle," said he, eagerly.

"Good evening, my lord count."

"Ah! Mademoiselle de la Vallière," continued Guiche, "how happy am I to meet with you."

"And I also, count, am delighted at this fortunate chance," said the young lady, making a movement to withdraw,

"Oh! no! no! do not leave me," cried de Guiche, "for you would belie the kind words you have just uttered. Remain, I entreat you; it is a most lovely evening. You shun the noisy crowd! you like your own society better! well, I can understand that; all women who have hearts do the same. Never will one of these feel weary when absent from the whirlwind of noisy pleasures. Oh! mademoiselle! mademoiselle!"

"But what has disturbed you then, my lord?" inquired la Vallière, with some degree of terror. "You appear agitated."

"No, not I—oh! no."

"Then, Monsieur de Guiche, allow me now to offer you those thanks which I had promised myself to offer to you at the first opportunity. It is to your protection, I know, that I am indebted for having been admitted among Madame's ladies of honor."

"Ah! yes, it was so, I remember now; and I congratulate myself upon it, mademoiselle. Do you love any one?"

"I!"

"Oh! pardon me; I know not what I am saying—a thousand pardons. Madame was right! quite right! this brutal exile has completely deranged my mind."

"But the king received you kindly, or it appeared so to me."

"Did you think so—kindly received—yes, perhaps he did so."

"Undoubtedly, he received you well; for, in short, you returned without his leave."

"That is true, and I believe you are right, mademoiselle. But have you not seen the Viscount de Bragelonne pass this way?"

La Vallière trembled on hearing this name.

"Why this question?" she inquired.

"Oh! good Heaven! have I again hurt your feelings," cried Guiche. "In that case I am very unfortunate; much to be pitied."

"Yes, very unfortunate, much to be pitied, Monsieur de Guiche, for you appear to be suffering dreadfully."

"Oh! mademoiselle, why have I not a devoted sister, a true friend."

"You have friends, Monsieur de Guiche; and the Viscount de Bragelonne, of whom you have just spoken, is, it appears to me, one of these good friends."

"Yes, yes, in fact, he is one of my good friends. Adieu! mademoiselle, adieu! please to accept my respects."

And he ran off like a madman along the margin of the lake.

His dark shadow was seen gliding among the yew trees and over the shining surface of the water.

La Vallière looked after him compassionately during some minutes.

"Oh! yes, yes, he suffers, and I begin to understand why it is so."

She had scarcely uttered these words when her companions, Mesdemoiselles de Montalais and de Tonnay Charente ran to her.

They had completed their service for the evening, laid aside their costumes

as nymphs, and, delighted with the beauty of the night, with the success of the evening, had returned to join their companion.

"What? you are here already?" they exclaimed. "We thought we should have been the first to arrive at the rendezvous."

"I have been here a quarter of an hour," replied la Vallière.

"Did not the dancing amuse you?"

"No."

"And the whole spectacle?"

"Neither. With regard to spectacles, I am much more pleased with that of these dark woods, amid which shines here and there a light which passes by like a red eye, sometimes opened, sometimes closed."

"She is a poetess, this la Vallière!" said Tonnay Charente.

"Which means to say, insupportable," observed Montalais; "every time one wishes to laugh a little, or to amuse one's self, la Vallière weeps: every time we wish to weep—we poor inferior women—for some dress we have lost, our self-love wounded, or a new ornament which has produced no effect, la Vallière laughs."

"Oh! as to me, I cannot be of such a disposition," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, "I am a woman, and woman more than all the rest. Who loves me flatters me; who flatters me pleases me by his flattery; and who pleases me—"

"Well, you do not conclude," remarked Montalais.

"It would be too difficult," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, laughing heartily. "Conclude it for me, you who have so much wit."

"Art you, Louise, does any one please you?"

"That does not concern any one," said the young girl, rising from the mossy bank on which she had been reclining during the whole time the ballet had lasted. "Now, young ladies, we had formed the project of amusing ourselves to-night, without any one to watch us, and without an escort. We are three, we shall please each other. The weather is superb: look yonder at the moon, gently rising in the heavens and silvering the tops of the chestnut trees and oaks. Oh! the delightful promenade! Oh! how shall we enjoy our liberty! the fine soft herbage of the woods! What a favor does your friendship grant to me! Let us walk arm in arm and gain the shadows of

those lofty tress. They are all now at supper and enjoying themselves soon they will be occupied in dressing themselves for a grand gala promenade; they are saddling their horses, preparing their carriages, the queen's mules, and Madame's four milk-white horses. We shall soon come to a spot where no eye can discern us, where no steps can follow us. Do you remember, Montalais, the woods of Cheverny and Chambord, the countless poplars of Blois? There we often interchanged our hopes, our fears for the future.

"And many secrets also."

"Yes."

"And I also think much," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, "but take care—"

"She says nothing," observed Montalais, "so that what Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente thinks Athénais alone knows it."

"Hush!" whispered Mademoiselle de la Vallière, "I hear steps coming this way."

"Quick! quick! into the rushes," cried Montalais, "stoop Athénais, you who are so tall."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, did in fact stoop down.

Almost immediately two gentlemen were seen advancing arm in arm, their heads bent towards each other, and walking on the fine gravel of the avenue which skirted the border of the lake.

The three young girls crouched down so as to be imperceptible.

"It is Monsieur de Guiche," whispered Montalais into Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente's ear.

"It is Monsieur de Bragelonne," whispered she to Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

The two young men continued to approach, conversing in an animated tone.

"It was close by that I saw her just now," said the count. "If I had only seen her, I might think it was but a vision, but I spoke to her."

"So that you are sure."

"Yes, but it may have happened that I alarmed her."

"And how so?"

"Why, good heaven! I was still bewildered by that I told you of; so that she will not have comprehended what I said, and may have been terrified."

"Oh!" said Bragelonne, "do not alarm yourself, my friend. She is kind-hearted and will excuse you. She has talent, and will understand."

"Yes; but if she has understood, too well understood me."

"What then?"

"And that she speaks of it?"

"Oh! you do not know Louise, count. Louise has every virtue, and has not a single defect."

And the young men passed on; the sound of their voices dying away little by little.

"How la Vallière!" cried Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, "the Viscount de Bragelonne said Louise when speaking of you. How does that happen?"

"We were brought up together," replied Mademoiselle de la Vallière, "as children we were companions."

"And besides that, M. de Bragelonne is her betrothed; everybody knows that."

"Oh! I did not know it. Is it true, mademoiselle?"

"That is to say," said Louise, blushing. "that is to say, that M. de Bragelonne has done me the honor to ask my hand—but—"

"But what?"

"But it appears that the king—"

"Well?"

"That the king will not consent to the marriage."

"And why the king? and who is the king?" cried Aure de Montalais, with bitterness. "Has the king any right to interfere in matters of this nature? 'The *pooliteec* is the *pooliteec*,' as Monsieur de Mazarin used to say, but love is love. If then you love M. de Bragelonne and he loves you, get married at once; I give my consent."

Athénais laughed heartily.

"Oh! I am speaking seriously," said Montalais, "and my opinion in this case is worth as much as the king's, I suppose. Is it not so, Louise?"

"Come! come!" said la Vallière, "those gentlemen have gone by. Let us take advantage of the solitude to get into the wood."

"And the more necessary," said Athénais, "that I see yonder, lights setting out from the palace and the theatre, which to me have the appearance of preceding some illustrious company."

"Let us run!" said they all three.

And gracefully raising the folds of their silken robes, they lightly ran across the space which separates the lake from the most shadowy part of the wood.

Montalais, light as a doe, Athénais, ardent as a young wolf, bounded over

the dry grass, and sometimes, a daring Acteon might have perceived in the shadow, their well formed but supple limbs, beneath the thick contour of their satin dresses.

La Vallière more delicate and more modest, allowed her dress to hang down, and retarded by the weakness of her foot, she soon called out to them for mercy. Being far behind she compelled her two companions to wait for her.

At that moment a man concealed in a ditch, on the banks of which was a young growth of willows, suddenly jumped on to the edge of the ditch, and ran off in the direction of the palace.

The three young ladies, on their side, attained the boundary of the park, all the avenues of which they were well acquainted with.

High flowery hedges rose from the borders of the ditches; closed barriers on that side protected the pedestrians from the invasion of horses and carriages.

In the distance and on the firm pavement of the high road could be heard the rumbling of the carriages in which were the queens and Madame. Many cavaliers were escorting them with that noise, so admirably imitated in the well cadenced verses of Virgil.

Some distant music harmonized with these sounds, and when it ceased, the nightingale, that songster so full of pride, sang for the company he knew were assembled beneath his leafy bower, notes that were more sweet, more complicated and more thrilling than any music in the world.

Near the palace, and in the sombre foliage of the lofty trees, shone forth the eyes of several owls, apparently enamored of this harmony.

So that this fête of the whole court was also a fête to the mysterious tenants of the wood; for assuredly the doe was listening in the heather, the pheasant on his branch, the fox within his earth.

The existence of all this nocturnal and invisible population could be divined from the sudden noises heard every now and then among the branches.

Then our wood nymphs would utter a slight suppressed scream, then laugh and continue on their way, and thus they reached the royal oak, the venerable remains of a tree which in its youth had heard the sighs of Henry II. for the lovely Diana of Poitiers, and

some years afterwards those of Henry IV. for the fair Gabrielle d'Estrées.

Beneath this oak the gardeners had formed a mossy bank, so comfortable in form that never could a circular seat have better rested the fatigued limbs of a monarch.

The trunk of the tree formed a rough back to this seat, but sufficiently wide to accommodate four persons.

Beneath the branches, which obliquely spread from its trunk, the voices of persons seated at its base were lost as they filtered through them towards the vaulted heavens.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHAT WAS SAID UNDER THE ROYAL OAK.

THERE was in the softness of the air, in the quietude of the foliage, a mute engagement to induce these three lovely girls immediately to change their jesting conversation for one of more serious interest.

The one whose disposition was the most lively of the three, Montalais, was the first to fall into a graver strain.

She began by a long drawn sigh.

"What happiness!" she exclaimed, "to feel that we are here, free, alone, and with the power of speaking frankly at all events to each other."

"Yes," said Mademoiselle Tonney Charente, "for the court, brilliant as it may be, always conceals falsehood beneath its velvet folds or the sparkling of its diamonds."

"As to me," observed la Vallière, "I never utter a falsehood; when I cannot speak the truth I hold my tongue."

"You will not be long in favor, then, my dear Louise," said Montalais; "it is not here as at Blois, where we could relate to old Madame all our vexations, inform her of all our desires. There were days on which Madame remembered that she, herself, had once been young. On those days, whoever conversed with Madame found in her a sincere friend. Madame would then tell us of her love scenes with Monsieur, and we would talk to her of her amors with others, or at all events of the rumors which had been current as to her gallantries. Poor woman! poor innocent woman! she would laugh, and we also. Where is she at this moment?"

"Ah! Montalais, laughing Montalais," cried la Vallière, "there you are sighing again; the woods inspire you, and you are almost reasonable this evening."

"Young ladies," said Athénais, "you ought not so much to regret the court at Blois, unless you do not feel yourselves happy here with us. A court is the place where men and women meet to talk of matters which mothers and guardians, and above all, our confessors, forbid with much severity. At court, we may speak of any thing under privilege of the king and queens: is not that most agreeable?"

"Oh! Athenais!" said Louise, blushing.

"Athénais is frank this evening," said Montalais, "let us profit by it."

"Yes, take advantage of it, for this evening you could tear from me the most profound secrets of my heart."

"Ah! if M. de Montespan were only here!" observed Montalais.

"You believe that I love M. de Montespan?" murmured the young girl.

"He is handsome, I suppose."

"Yes; and that is no trifling advantage in my eyes."

"You see now!"

"I will say more; he is of all the men that we see here the handsomest and the—"

"What is that we hear?" cried la Vallière, rising with terror from the mossy bank.

"Some deer that is making its way through the wood."

"I am only afraid of men," remarked Athénais.

"When they do not resemble M. de Montespan!"

"A truce to raillery; M. de Montespan is very attentive to me; but that binds no one. Have we not here M. de Guiche who is very attentive to Madame?"

"Poor, poor youth!" exclaimed la Vallière.

"And why poor?—Madame is beautiful enough and of sufficient high rank, I should presume."

La Vallière mournfully shook her head.

"When a man loves," said she, "it is neither the beautiful nor the great lady; my dear friends, when one loves, it must be the heart and the eyes only, of the person that one loves."

Montalais laughed noisily.

"Heart, eyes, oh! what sweetmeats!" she exclaimed.

"I speak for myself," replied la Vallière.

"Noble sentiments!" said Athénais with a protecting air, but coldly.

"Are they not yours, mademoiselle?" inquired Louise.

"Precisely, mademoiselle; but I will proceed; how can any one pity a man who pays attention to a woman like Madame? If there be any disproportion it is on the side of the court."

"Oh! no, no," exclaimed la Vallière, "it is on the side of Madame."

"Explain yourself."

"I will explain; Madame has not even the desire to know what love is. She plays with this feeling as children do with fire-works, a spark from which might set fire to a palace. It shines, and that is all that's wished for. Gold, joy, love, such is the tissue, she wishes her life to be composed of. M. de Guiche will love this illustrious lady; she will never love him."

Athénais burst into a loud disdainful laugh.

"Do people love?" said she, "where are your noble sentiments of justice now? The virtue of a woman does it not exist in her courageous refusal of any intrigue that may be attended by consequences. A well organized woman, gifted with a generous heart should look at men, make herself loved by them, adored even, and say at the most only once in her life, 'well! it appears to me I should not have been what I am; I should have less detested this one than the others.'"

"Then!" exclaimed la Vallière, clasping her hands, "this is what you promise to M. de Montespan!"

"Why, assuredly, to him as to any other. What! did I not tell you that I recognized in him a certain superiority, and that would not suffice! My dear friend, we are women, that is to say queens, the whole time that nature has allotted to us to exercise that sovereignty, from the age of fifteen to thirty-five; we are after that at liberty to have a heart, when we have nothing else."

"Oh! oh!" murmured la Vallière.

"Admirable!" exclaimed Montalais; "here is really a superior woman. Athénais, you will work marvels."

"Do you not approve me?"

"Oh! with both hands and feet!" said the sarcastic girl.

"You are merely jesting, are you not Montalais?" said Louise.

"No, no, I approve all that Athénais has just said; only—"

"Only what?"

"Well then, that I could not practise it. I have the most complete principles; I form resolutions in comparison with which the projects of the Stadtholder and the King of Spain are mere child's play; then the day when they are to be put in execution—nothing."

"You vacillate," said Athénais with disdain.

"Most unworthily."

"Unfortunate disposition," continued Athénais. But at least you make a choice?"

"Why in good faith—in sincerity—no! Fate seems to delight in thwarting me in every thing. I dream of emperors and I find only—"

"Aure! Aure!" exclaimed la Vallière, "for pity's sake, for the poor pleasure of merely uttering a witty saying, do not sacrifice those who love you with such devoted affection."

"Oh! as to that it no ways troubles me; those who love me are but too happy that I do not drive them from me, my dear girl. So much the worse for me if I have a weakness, but so much the worse for them if I revenge myself upon them. And, in faith, I do revenge myself."

"Aure."

"You are right," said Athénais, "and perhaps you will attain the same end. That is called being a coquette, do you see, mademoiselle. Men who are fools in many things are so, above all, when they include under this word coquetry, the pride of a woman, and her variableness. As to myself, I am proud, that is to say, impregnable; I rudely treat every pretender, but without any pretension to retain them. The men say I am a coquette, because they have the self-love to believe that I desire their adorations. Other women, Montalais for instance, have allowed themselves to be gained upon by adulation; they would be completely lost, but for the thrice happy gift of instinct which urges them suddenly to change and chastise him whose homage they had erewhile accepted."

"A learned dissertation!" said Montalais with the tone of a delighted epicure.

"Hateful!" murmured Louise.

"Thanks to this coquetry, for this is the true coquetry," continued Made-

moiselle de Tonnay Charente, "the lover, puffed up with pride but an hour before, becomes in a minute diminished, by the whole extent of his self-love. He had already assumed conquering airs but he draws back. He was about to protect us, but he prostrates himself anew. The result of this is that instead of having a jealous trouble—some husband, we have a lover who is always trembling, always coveting our favor, always submissive, for the sole reason that he always finds in us a new mistress. This is, and be persuaded of it young ladies, the true essence of coquetry; possessing this we become a queen among women, when we have not been endowed with the valuable faculty of putting a bridle on our hearts and on our minds."

"Oh! what talent you possess," said Montalais, "and how well you understand the duties of women."

"I arrange matters as well as I am able for my own happiness," observed Athénais, modestly. "I defend myself as do all the weaker animals against the oppression of the stronger."

La Vallière said not a word.

"Does she not approve what you have said?"

"Who, I? Why I do not even understand it," said Louise, "for you speak like beings who had not been called to live upon this earth."

"A mighty pretty thing indeed is your earth," said Montalais.

"A world," rejoined Athénais, "in which man offers incense to a woman, in order that he may cause her fall, and then insult her when she has fallen."

"Who spoke to you of falling?" asked Louise.

"Ah! that is a new theory, my dear; explain to me, if you please, your means for not being vanquished, if you allow yourself to be led on by love."

"Oh!" exclaimed the young girl, raising her lovely and humid eyes to heaven, "oh! did you but know what 'tis to have a heart, I would explain it to you, and convince you a loving heart is stronger than all your coquetry, and of more avail than all your pride. Never has a woman been loved, according to my belief, and God now hears me, never does a man love with idolatry unless he feels that he is beloved. Leave to the old men in our comedies the ridiculous belief that they can be beloved by coquettes. The young man understands this, and does

not deceive himself; if he feels a passion, an effervescence, a rage for the coquette, you see I give you a large field, if, in a word, the coquette can drive him mad, never can she make him truly love her.

"Love, as I conceive it, do you see, is an incessant, absolute, entire sacrifice; but it is not the sacrifice of only one of the two united parties. It is the complete abnegation of two souls which wish to melt into one only. If I should ever love, I would entreat my lover to leave me free and pure; I would tell him, and he would understand me, that my heart was torn by the refusal I was making, and he, who should love me, feeling the painful greatness of my sacrifice, he, in his turn would, like me, sacrifice himself, he would respect me, and would not seek to bring about my fall, and then insult me, as you said, but now, blaspheming against that love which I comprehend. This is the way, the only way in which I love."

"And now, tell me if you can, that my lover will despise me; I defy him to do so, unless indeed he be the vilest of men, and my heart will guarantee me from choosing a man of that description. My regard will compensate him for that sacrifice, or will inspire him with virtues which he never imagined he possessed."

"But Louise," said Montalais, "you talk to us of these things, but you do not practise them."

"What mean you?"

"You are adored by Raoul de Bragelonne. The poor youth is as much the victim of your virtue as he would be, indeed much more than he would be, of my coquetry or of the pride of Athénais."

"This is purely and simply a subdivision of coquetry," said Athénais, "and mademoiselle, as it appears to me, practises it without being aware of it."

"Oh!" exclaimed la Vallière.

"Yes, this is termed instinct, perfect sensibility, exquisite refinement of feelings, a perpetual demonstration of passionate outbursts without result. Oh! this is also very skilful and most efficacious. I should even, now that I reflect upon it, have preferred these tactics, to combat against men, to my pride; because it offers the advantage sometimes of inducing the belief of a positive conviction; but at present, without absolutely passing condemnation on myself,

I declare it to be superior to the simple coquetry of Montalais."

The two young girls laughed.

La Vallière alone remained silent and shook her head.

Then, after a moment,

"Were you to say the fourth of what you have said to me, before a man, or even were I persuaded that they were your real sentiments, I should die from shame and grief upon the spot."

"Well then, die, tender little one," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charante, "for although there are no men here, there are two women, your own friends who declare that you are accused and convicted of being a coquette by instinct,—an ingenious coquette, which means to say the most dangerous species of the coquette genus existing in the world."

"Oh! mesdemoiselles!" exclaimed la Vallière, blushing, and nearly weeping.

The two companions burst into a fresh fit of laughter.

"Well then I will ask Bragelonne for information on the subject," cried Montalais.

"Ask Bragelonne!" said Athénais.

"Why, yes; that tall youth valiant as Cæsar, acute and witty as M. Fouquet, that poor lad who has known you for the last twelve years, and loves you, and yet, if we were willing to believe you has never kissed even the tips of your fingers."

"Explain to us, then, this cruelty, you the woman of the loving heart," said Athénais to la Vallière.

"I can explain it by a single word, virtue. Will you perchance, deny the existence of virtue?"

"Come, now Louise, speak the truth," said Aure taking her hand.

"What is it you would have me say?" cried la Vallière.

"Any thing you please; but whatever you may say, I shall still persist in my opinion with regard to you—a coquette by instinct—an ingenious coquette. I have said it and repent it, the most dangerous coquette of all."

"Oh! no, no, for mercy's sake, believe not that."

"How! twelve years of absolute rigor!"

"Oh! twelve years ago, I was but five years old, the freedoms of a child cannot be brought into account against the young girl."

"Well! you are now seventeen; we will therefore say three years instead of twelve. For three years you have

been constantly and positively cruel; and this having to contend against the mute and shady bowers of Blois; rendezvous in which the stars might have been counted; nocturnal meetings beneath the plantains, his twenty years addressing your fourteen; the fire of his eyes speaking an eloquent language."

"Be it so; be it so; but thus it is."

"Come now, that is impossible."

"But, good heaven! why should it be impossible?"

"Tell us credible things, my dear, and we will believe them."

"But, in fine, imagine one thing."

"Come now, what is it?"

"Conclude, or we shall imagine much more than you would wish."

"Let us suppose then, that I believed I loved, but that I do not."

"How! you do not love!"

"What would you? If I act differently from others when they love, it is because I do not love; because my hour has not yet come."

"Louise! Louise!" said Montalais, "beware! I am about to retort the words you said just now. Raoul is not here, do not maltreat him thus when absent. Be charitable, and if on examining the question thoroughly you find you do not love him, tell him so, poor youth!"

And she again laughed.

"Mademoiselle was just now pitying M. de Guiche," said Athénais, "could not the secret of her indifference for the one be found in her compassion for the other?"

"Overwhelm me, mesdemoiselles," sorrowfully replied la Vallière, "overwhelm me since you cannot comprehend me."

"Oh! oh!" cried Montalais, "Ili humor! grief and tears! Why, we are laughing, Louise, and are not I can assure you the monsters you believe; look at Athénais, the proud, as she is called. She does not love M. de Montespan, 'tis true but she would be in despair did not M. de Montespan love her. Look at me, I laugh at M. Malicorne, but poor Malicorne at whom I laugh, well knows how, whenever he pleases, to press my hand to his lips, and then the oldest of us is not more than twenty—what a prospect we have before us!"

"Silly, silly girls that you are!" murmured Louise.

"'Tis true!" said Montalais, "and you alone have uttered words of wisdom!"

"Oh! assuredly!"

"Granted!" replied Athénais. "So, decidedly you do not love this poor M. de Bragelonne?"

"Perhaps," said Montalais, "she is not very sure of it as yet. But, at all events, listen to me, Athénais; should M. de Bragelonne become free, let me give you a friendly counsel."

"What is it?"

"It is to consider twice before you decide on having M. de Montespan."

"Oh! if you are taking it in that way, my dear, M. de Bragelonne is not the only one we find pleasure in looking at; and, for instance, M. de Guiche is not to be despised."

"He did not shine this evening, and I know from good authority that Madame thought him perfectly odious."

"But M. de Saint-Aignan was very brilliant, and I am sure that more than one who saw him dance will not soon forget him. Is it not so, la Vallière?"

"Why do you address that question to me? I did not see him, I do not know him."

"You have never seen M. de Saint-Aignan! you do not know him?"

"No."

"Come, come, do not affect this virtue, which is more savage than our pride. You have eyes, have you not?"

"Excellent ones."

"Then you must have seen all our dancers this evening."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"That 'I suppose' is rather impertinent as applied to them."

"I give it you for what it is worth."

"Come, now, tell us, among all the gentlemen you suppose you have seen, which one do you prefer?"

"Yes," said Montalais, "yes, is it M. de Saint-Aignan, M. de Guiche, M. de M—"

"I prefer neither of them, mesdemoiselles. I think them all equally good looking."

"Then amid all this brilliant assembly, amid this court, the first one of the world, no one has pleased you?"

"I do not say that."

"Speak, then; let us know who is your ideal hero."

"He is not ideal."

"Then he does exist?"

"In truth, mesdemoiselles," said la Vallière, thus hardly pressed, "I cannot at all understand you. What! you have hearts as I have, you have eyes as I have, and you speak of M. de Guiche, of M. de Saint-Aignan, of M.

—I know not who—and the king was there."

These words, uttered hurriedly, in an agitated and ardent voice, produced a loud exclamation from each side of her which almost terrified her.

"The king! the king!" simultaneously exclaimed Montalais and Athénais.

La Vallière leaned forward, covering her face with both hands.

"Oh! yes, the king," murmured she; "have you then ever seen any one who can be compared to the king?"

"You were quite right in saying just now, mademoiselle, that you had excellent eyes, for you can see far, too far! Alas! the king is not one upon whom our poor inferior eyes have the right to fix themselves."

"Oh! that is true! that is true!" cried la Vallière, "it is not given to all eyes to gaze directly at the sun; but I will look at it even should it blind me."

At that moment, and as if occasioned by the words which had fallen from the lips of la Vallière, a crackling of leaves and branches, and the rustling of silk was heard proceeding from a neighboring bush.

The young ladies jumped up with much alarm; they distinctly saw the foliage moving, without seeing the object which made it stir.

"Oh! a wolf! a wild boar!" exclaimed Montalais, "let us fly! let us fly!"

And the three young girls ran off with indescribable terror, taking the first avenue that presented itself to them, and did not stop till they had reached the border of the wood.

There, breathless, leaning against each other, mutually feeling the palpitation of each other's hearts, they endeavored to recover themselves, but did not succeed till after the lapse of some minutes.

At length, perceiving some lights in the direction of the palace, they decided on walking on towards them.

La Vallière was exhausted with fatigue; Aure and Athénais supported her.

"Oh! we have escaped it nicely," said Montalais.

"Mesdemoiselles! mesdemoiselles!" said la Vallière, "I greatly fear that it was not a wolf. As to me, and I speak as I think, I would have preferred encountering the risk of being devoured by a wild beast than to have been listened to and heard. Oh! mad, mad

that I was so have thought and uttered the things I did."

And thereupon, her head bowed down like a reed, she felt her knees grow weaker and all her strength abandon her. She slid almost immediately from her companions' arms and fell upon the grass.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ANXIETY OF THE KING.

LET us leave poor la Vallière, half fainting between her two companions, and return to the neighborhood of the royal oak.

The young girls had not fled twenty paces when the noise, which had so much terrified them, became more and more loud.

The form of a man was soon seen, and, putting aside the branches, appeared at the edge of the wood. On finding the place deserted he burst into a hearty laugh.

It would be needless to say that this form was that of a young and handsome gentleman, who immediately made sign to another, who, in his turn, made his appearance.

"Well, sire," said the second form, advancing timidly, "has your majesty frightened away our young innamoratas?"

"Yes, in good earnest," said the king; "and you may show yourself with perfect freedom, Saint Aignan."

"But, sire, be cautious; you will be recognized."

"Have I not told you that they have fled?"

"This is a fortunate adventure, sire, and if I dared counsel your majesty, I would say that we should follow them."

"They are already distant."

"Oh! they would be glad enough to be overtaken; and, above all, did they but know who are the persons that are pursuing them."

"And what makes you think so, Mr. Fop?"

"Why one of them avowed I was to her taste, and another compared you to the sun."

"The greater reason for our remaining concealed," Saint Aignan. "The sun does not show himself at night."

"Upon my faith, sire, your majesty is by no means curious. Were I in

your place, I should wish to know who are the two nymphs, the two dryads, the two hamadryads, who have formed so good an opinion of us."

"Oh! I shall recognize them without running after them, I promise you."

"And how so?"

"Why, by the voice, assuredly. They are of the court, and she who spoke of me had a most charming voice."

"Ah! there now, your majesty is allowing yourself to be influenced by flattery."

"It cannot be said that it is a means which you make use of."

"Oh! pardon, sire, I am a mere simpleton."

"Come now, and let us go in search of what I spoke of to you."

"And the passion, of which you made me your confidant, sire, is it already forgotten?"

"Oh! no, no, assuredly. How can you conceive it possible that any one can forget such eyes as those of Made-moiselle de la Vallière."

"Oh! the other has such a charming voice."

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Of her who loves the sun."

"M. de Saint Aignan!"

"Your pardon, sire."

"Moreover, I am not sorry that you should think that I am as fond of harmonious voices as of fine eyes. I know you well, you are a terrible gossipper, and to-morrow I shall suffer from the confidence I have reposed in you."

"And in what manner?"

"I feel well assured that to-morrow every one will know that I have some ideas with regard to that little la Vallière; but beware, Saint Aignan, I have confided my secret to you, and to you only, and should a single person speak to me of it, I shall know who has betrayed my secret."

"Oh! what warmth, sire."

"No, but you must understand: I do not wish to injure the reputation of this poor girl."

"Sire, fear me not."

"You promise me?"

"Sire, I pledge my word."

"Good," thought the king, laughing in his sleeve, "the world will know to-morrow that I to-night have been running after la Vallière."

Then endeavoring to discover where he was—

"Why really, I think we have lost ourselves," said he.

"Oh! not very dangerously."

"And where does this descent lead to?"

"To the great circular opening, sire."

"Where we were going when we heard the voices of those ladies?"

"Yes, sire, and the conclusion of that conversation in which I had the honor to hear my name mentioned at the same moment with that of your majesty."

"You return very frequently to that subject, Saint Aignan."

"I trust your majesty will pardon me, but I am delighted to know that there is one woman who thinks of me without my knowing it, and without my having done anything to induce it. Your majesty cannot appreciate my satisfaction, you whose rank and merit attract attention and compel love."

"Well, then, Saint Aignan, I say no, and you may believe it as you will," rejoined the king, leaning familiarly on Saint Aignan's arm, and taking the path which he thought would lead him to the palace; "but this ingenuous confidence, this altogether disinterested preference of a woman who perhaps my eyes may never fall upon, in a word, the mysterious nature of this adventure excites me, and, in truth, were my mind not so much occupied with la Vallière—"

"Oh! do not allow that to prevent your majesty; you have time, and to spare, to think of her."

"And how so?"

"It is said that la Vallière is astonishingly punctilious."

"You excite me still more, Saint Aignan, and I am most anxious to discover her. Come, come."

The king spake not the truth; for, on the contrary, there was nothing for which he was less anxious; but he had a part to play.

And he walked on rapidly. Saint Aignan followed him at a short distance.

Suddenly the king stopped; the courtier imitated his example.

"Saint Aignan," said the king, "do you not hear some one sighing?"

"Who, I?"

"Yes, listen."

"In fact, I do, and cries, also, it seems to me."

"It is on that side," said the king, pointing to the left.

"One would say there is some one weeping, a woman sobbing," cried Saint Aignan.

"Let us run!"

And the king and his favorite, taking a narrow cross path, ran swiftly upon the grass.

As they advanced the cries became more distinct.

"Help! help!" cried two voices.

The two young men redoubled their swiftness.

The cries became louder and louder as they approached.

"Help! help!" was constantly repeated.

Suddenly, by the side of a ditch, and under the long branches of a weeping willow, they perceived a woman on her knees, holding the head of another woman, who had fainted.

At some paces from them was another woman, who, from the middle of the road, was calling out for assistance.

On perceiving the two gentlemen, of whose rank she was ignorant, the cries of the woman who was calling for help were redoubled.

The king, who was in advance of his companion, jumped over the ditch, and was near the group at the moment when, from the end of the avenue which led towards the palace, advanced a dozen persons, attracted thither by the same cries which had been heard by the king and Saint Aignan.

"What then has happened, young ladies?" inquired Louis.

"The king!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montalais, in her astonishment, letting fall the head of la Vallière, which she was holding on her knee, who then fell at full length on the grass.

"Yes, the king! But that is not a reason for abandoning your companion. Who is she?"

"It is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, sire."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière!"

"Who has just fainted."

"Ah! good Heaven!" exclaimed the king. Poor child! quick, quick, a surgeon."

But notwithstanding the eagerness with which the king had pronounced these words, he had not so well played his part, but that the words and the gesture which accompanied them, must have appeared cold to M. de Saint Aignan, to whom had been confided the secret of the great passion which had so suddenly inflamed his majesty.

"Saint Aignan," continued the king, "watch over Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I beg of you, send for a surgeon. As to myself, I will run to Madame to

inform her of the accident which has just happened to her maid of honor."

And, while M. de Saint Aignan was taking measures to have Mademoiselle de la Vallière conveyed to the palace, the king hastened forward, delighted at having found an opportunity for approaching Madame, and of speaking to her with so specious a pretext.

Happily a carriage was passing by; the coachman was ordered to stop, and the persons it was conveying, on being informed of the accident, hastened to cede it to Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

The current of air created by the rapid pace of the horses soon recalled the invalid to consciousness.

On arriving at the palace, she was able, although still very weak, to alight from the carriage, and reach with the assistance of Athénais and Montalais, the interior of the apartments.

They made her sit down in a room leading to the saloons on the ground floor.

And then as the accident had made but a slight impression on the promenaders they resumed their walk.

During this time the king had found Madame in a covered avenue; he had seated himself by her, and his foot had gently sought the foot of the princess.

"Take care, sire," said Henrietta in a whisper, "you do not appear so indifferent as you should."

"Alas!" replied Louis XIV. in the same tone, "I much fear that we have entered into a convention beyond our powers."

And then aloud,

"You have heard of the accident," said he.

"What accident?"

"Oh! good heaven! on seeing you I forgot that I had come expressly to relate it to you. And yet it has painfully affected me; one of your maids of honor, poor la Vallière, has just now fainted."

"Ah! poor child!" tranquilly said the princess, "and what occasioned this?"

Then in a whisper,

"Why you think not what you are doing sire, you wish to make people believe that you have a strong passion for this girl, and you remain here when she is dying yonder."

"Ah! Madame! Madame! said the king sighing, "how much more at home are you in your part than I am, and how you think of all."

And he rose from his chair.

"Madame," said he, loud enough to be heard by every one present, "allow me to leave you, my anxiety is great, and I wish to assure myself, personally, if every proper care has been taken of her."

And the king withdrew to visit la Vallière, while all the courtiers were commenting upon the words he had uttered.

"My anxiety is great."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE KING'S SECRET.

On the way Louis met the Count de Saint Aignan.

"Well! Saint Aignan," said the king with affected agitation, "how is the invalid?"

"Why, sire," stammered Saint Aignan, "I acknowledge to my shame, I do not know."

"How! you do not know, sir!" cried the king, feigning to be indignant at this want of attention to the object of his predilection.

"Sire, pray pardon me; but I happened to fall in with one of our three chatterers, and I acknowledge that this meeting distracted my attention."

"Ah! you have discovered them?" said the king, eagerly.

"I have found the one who deigned to speak so favorably of me, and having found my one, I was seeking yours when I had the good fortune to meet your majesty."

"That is very well, but before all, let us think of Mademoiselle de la Vallière," said the king, faithful to the part he was playing.

"Oh! what an interesting fair one," said Saint Aignan, "and how superfluous was her fainting, since your majesty felt so much for her even before that."

"And the name of your own belle, Saint Aignan, is it a secret?"

"Sire, it ought to be a secret, and a very great secret, even; but for your majesty, you well know, that no secret exists."

"Her name, then?"

"It is Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente."

"She is handsome."

"Yes, sire, beyond all compare, and I recognized the voice which had pronounced my name so tenderly. Upon

this I accosted her, questioned her as closely as I could in the midst of the throng, and she told me, not having the slightest suspicion, that a short time before she had been at the great oak with two of her friends, when the sudden apparition of a wolf or a robber had terrified them and put them to flight."

"But," cried the king earnestly, "the names of those two friends?"

"Sire," said Saint Aignan, "let your majesty send me to the Bastille—"

"And why should I do that?"

"Because I am an egotist or a fool. My surprise was so great at such a conquest, and its so fortunate discovery, that I went no further. Besides, I did not believe, your majesty being so much occupied with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, that you attached so much importance to what you had heard. And then Mademoiselle de Tonny Charente left me very precipitately to return to Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Well, I must hope that chance will favor me as it has you. Come Saint Aignan."

"My king is ambitious, I perceive, and will not allow any conquest to escape him. Well, I promise him that I will search most conscientiously, and, moreover, from one of the three graces I shall be able to learn the names of the others, and by that the secret."

"And I also," said the king, "I need only hear her voice to recognize her. Come now, we will leave this subject, therefore conduct me to poor la Vallière."

"Well, really," thought Saint Aignan, "this passion is beginning to seem serious, and for such a little girl as that, it is most surprising; I should never have believed it."

And as while thus thinking, he had pointed out to the king the room into which la Vallière had been conducted, the king entered it.

Saint Aignan followed him.

In one of the lower rooms, and near a large window opening upon the gardens, la Vallière seated in a vast arm-chair, was inhaling the balmy air of the night.

From her loosened dress the lace was falling in disorder, mingling with the long ringlets of her lovely hair which bestrewed her shoulders.

With languishing eyes, the fire of which was but half extinguished, and swimming in large tears, she lived only

as one of those lovely visions of our dreams which pass all pale and all poetical before the closed eyes of the sleeper, opening their eyes without moving them, their lips without uttering a sound.

The fear-like palor of la Vallière had a charm which it would be impossible to describe; the sufferings of mind and body had imparted to her lovely countenance the harmony of noble grief; the absolute inertness of her arms and bust gave her more the appearance of a corpse than of a living being; she appeared to hear neither the whisperings of her companions, nor the distant noise of the joyous crowd. She was communing with herself, and her beautiful hands, with their long and tapering fingers, trembled from time to time as from the contact of some invisible pressure.

The king entered the room without her perceiving his arrival, so deeply was she absorbed in her revery.

He saw from a distance that adorable face upon which the moon was showering the pure light of its silver lamp.

"Gracious heaven!" cried the king with involuntary terror, "she is dead."

"No, no, sire," said Montalais in a whisper, on the contrary she is better. "Is it not so Louise? you are better, are you not?"

La Vallière did not reply.

"Louise," continued Montalais, "here is the king who deigns to feel anxious as to your health."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise suddenly starting up, as if a sudden flame had shot from her extremities to her heart, "the king anxious about my health?"

"Yes," replied Montalais.

"The king is here then?" murmured la Vallière without daring to look around her.

"That voice! that voice!" eagerly whispered Louis into Saint Aignan's ear.

"Why—yes, your majesty is right, it is the one who is in love with the sun."

"Hush!" said the king.

Then approaching la Vallière,

"You are indisposed, mademoiselle: I saw you fainting even a short time since, in the park. How did this attack come on?"

"Sire," stammered the poor girl, trembling and pale as death; "in truth I cannot tell."

"You had walked too far, and the fatigue perhaps—"

"No, sire," hastily said Montalais replying for her friend, "it could not have been fatigue, for we had spent part of the evening under the royal oak—"

"Under the royal oak!" reiterated the king with some degree of agitation, "I was not mistaken, I had judged rightly."

And he exchanged a significant glance with the count."

"Ah! yes," said the count, "under the royal oak with Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente."

"How can you know that?" cried Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"I know it in the most natural way imaginable, Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente told me so."

"Then she must also have told you the cause of la Vallière's fainting."

"Oh! she said something about a wolf or a robber, I scarcely remember which."

La Vallière was listening with fixed eyes and heaving bosom, as if she divined some portion of the truth.

Louis conceived this attitude and this agitation to be the consequence of her terror which she had not yet been able to overcome.

"Fear nothing," said he, with an emotion which he could not conceal, "the wolf which caused you so much alarm, was neither more nor less than a two-legged wolf."

"It was a man! it was a man!" cried Louise, "there was a man there listening."

"Well, mademoiselle, and what great harm do you see, in having been overheard? Can you have then uttered words which in your opinion ought not to have been heard?"

La Vallière convulsively clasped her hands together, and hastily covered her face with them, thus endeavoring to conceal her blushes.

"Oh! in the name of heaven!" she exclaimed, "who was it that was concealed! who was it then who heard?"

The king advanced to take one of her hands.

"It was myself," said he, bowing with gentle respect, "can I, perchance, terrify you."

La Vallière uttered a loud shriek, and for the second time her strength abandoned her, for cold, moaning and in despair she fell back inanimate into the arm-chair.

The king had only time to stretch

forth his arm, so that she was in part supported by him.

At two paces from the king and la Vallière were standing Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente and Montalais, both motionless and petrified at the recollection of their conversation with la Vallière. They did not think of rendering her assistance, restrained as they were, by the presence of the king, who with one knee on the ground, was sustaining la Vallière.

"And you heard, sire?" murmured Athénais.

But the king did not reply; his eyes were fixed on la Vallière's half closed eye-lids, he held her lifeless hand within his.

"Yes, by Jupiter," exclaimed Saint Aignan who on his side was hoping for the fainting of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, and therefore advanced with open arms, "we did not lose even a word."

But the proud Athénais was not a woman to faint away so readily, she darted a furious look at Saint Aignan and flew out of the room.

Montalais, more courageous, advanced hurriedly towards Louise, and raised her from the king's arm, who had already become much agitated on feeling his face inundated with the perfumed hair of the lifeless girl.

"Well! this is an adventure indeed," said Saint Aignan, "and if I am not the first to relate it I shall be confoundedly unlucky."

The king went up to him and in an agitated and furious voice said to him.

"Count, not a word of this!"

The poor king had completely forgotten that an hour before he had addressed to this same man the same injunction, but with a very opposite intention; that is to say that he then wished him to be indiscreet.

This recommendation was therefore as superfluous as the former.

Half an hour afterwards all Fontainebleau was informed that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had been engaged in conversation with Montalais and Tonnay Charente, and that in this conversation she had acknowledged her love for the king.

It was also known that the king after having manifested great anxiety at the alarming state of Mademoiselle la Vallière's health, had turned pale and trembled on receiving the fainting fair one in his arms; so that it was decided

unanimously among the courtiers that the greatest event of that epoch had just revealed itself; that the king loved Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and consequently that Monsieur might sleep in perfect tranquillity.

This was, at all events, what the queen-mother, as much surprised as any one at this sudden change, hastened to declare to the young queen and to Philippe of Orleans.

She however stated the case somewhat differently to the two interested parties.

To her daughter-in-law—

"See now, Therese!" said she, "were you not greatly in the wrong to accuse the king? To-day every body is asserting that he has a new mistress; why should the story of to-day be more credible than that of yesterday; and why that of yesterday more so than that of to-day?"

And to Monsieur, after relating to him the adventure of the royal oak,

"Are you not absurd in your jealousies, my dear Philippe? It is clearly proved that the king's head is completely turned by this little la Vallière. But do not say a word of this to your wife; the queen would instantly know all about it."

This last confidential communication had its immediate effect.

Monsieur, tranquillized and triumphant, went in search of his wife, and as it was not yet midnight, and the fête was to last until two in the morning, he offered her his hand for the promenade.

But after he had walked a few steps the first thing he did was to disobey his mother's injunction.

"Now mind you do not tell the queen all that is said about the king," whispered he, mysteriously.

"And what is it that is said about the king?" inquired Madame.

"That my brother has been suddenly smitten with a most strange passion."

"For whom?"

"For that little la Vallière."

It being dark Madame could smile at her ease.

"Ah!" said she, "and how long has he been so smitten?"

"For some days past, as it appears. But it was only smoke before; it was this evening that the flame burst forth."

"The king has good taste, for, in my opinion, the little girl is charming."

"It seems to me that you speak this in mockery, my dearest."

"Who, I! and how so?"

"At all events, this passion will bring happiness to some one, if it be only to la Vallière."

"But," rejoined the princess, "in truth, you speak as if you could read the very thoughts of the maid of honor. Who tells you that she will consent to respond to the king's passion?"

"And who has told you that she will not respond to it?"

"She loves the Viscount de Bragelonne."

"Ah! you believe that."

"She is even betrothed to him."

"She was so."

"What mean you?"

"Why, when they came to the king to ask permission to conclude the marriage he refused that permission."

"Refused!"

"Yes, although it was to the Count de la Fère himself, whom the king, as you know, honors with great esteem, for the part he played in the restoration of your brother, and in some other matters which happened many years ago."

"Well, the poor lovers will have to stay till the king shall alter his opinion. They are young, they have plenty of time before them."

"Ah! my dearest," cried Philippe laughing in his turn, "I see that you do not know the most curious part of the affair."

"How!"

"That which has most deeply moved the king."

"The king then has been deeply moved?"

"To the heart."

"And by what? Speak quickly; let me hear."

"By an adventure, than which nothing can be more romantic."

"You know how much I like to hear of those adventures, and you keep me in suspense!" said the princess, impatiently.

"Well, thus it was.—"

And Monsieur paused.

"Say on; I am listening."

"Under the royal oak—you know where stands the royal oak?"

"That is of little import. Under the royal oak, you said."

"Well, Mademoiselle la Vallière, thinking herself alone with two of her companions, told them, in confidence, of her love for the king."

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame, beginning to feel somewhat uneasy, "of her love for the king?"

"Yes."

"And when was this?"

"About an hour ago."

Madame shuddered.

"And did no one know of this passion?"

"No one."

"Not even his majesty?"

"Not even his majesty. The little thing had kept her secret most carefully, when suddenly the secret became stronger than herself, and all at once escaped her."

"And from whom have you heard all these absurdities?"

"Why, every body knows it."

"Then from whom has all the world heard it?"

"From la Vallière herself, who avowed her love to Montalais and Tonnay Charente, her companions."

Madame stopped and with an abrupt movement drew her hand from within her husband's.

"It is an hour ago since she made this avowal?" inquired Madame.

"Somewhere about that time."

"And the king, was he informed of it?"

"But it is precisely that which makes the matter so romantic. The king was there, with Saint Aignan, behind the royal oak, and heard the whole of this most interesting conversation, without losing even a syllable of it."

Madame felt herself struck to the very heart.

"But I have seen the king since then," said she, incautiously, "and he said not a word to me of all this."

"And no wonder," cried Monsieur, with the simplicity of a husband who feels himself secure, "he took good care not to speak of it to you himself, since he particularly desired that no one should mention it to you."

"What said you?" cried Madame, somewhat irritated.

"I say that they wished to conceal this affair from you."

"And why then should they conceal any thing from me in particular?"

"In the apprehension that your friendship might induce you to reveal the matter to the young queen, and nothing more."

Madame held down her head; she was mortally wounded.

She could no longer rest until she had seen the king.

As a king is naturally the last person in the kingdom who knows what is said of him, as a lover is the only one who knows not what is said of his mistress, when the king perceived Madame who was seeking him, he went up to her with somewhat of confusion, but still graciously.

Madame awaited, that he should be the first to speak of la Vallière.

Then as he did not speak of her,

"And the little one?" inquired she.

"What little one?" cried the king.

"La Vallière—did you not tell me, sire, that she had fainted?"

"She is still very much indisposed," replied the king, affecting the greatest indifference.

"But this will be altogether in opposition to the rumors you were to have spread, sire."

"What rumors?"

"That you pay much attention to her."

"Oh! I trust that they will be propagated, notwithstanding," replied the king, absently.

Madame still waited; she wished to ascertain whether the king would speak to her of the adventure under the royal oak, but the king said not a word upon the subject.

Madame, on her side, did not open her lips with regard to the adventure, so that the king took leave of her without having confided the matter to her in the least.

The king had scarcely taken leave of her when she sought for Saint Aignan.

There was not much difficulty in finding Saint Aignan; he was like those small vessels which are tenders in a convoy, he followed always in the wake of the larger ships.

Saint Aignan was precisely the man whom Madame required in the state of mind which just then oppressed her.

He was only seeking some ear more worthy than the common herd of courtiers into which he could pour the whole details with regard to the affair.

And therefore he did not spare Madame a single word, and when he had related the whole affair to her—

"Acknowledge," said Madame, "that this is a most charming tale."

"Tale? no; history, yes."

"Acknowledge that be it tale or history, you have related it to me as you were told it, but that you were not present."

"Madam, upon my honor I was present."

"And you think that these avowals have made an impression on the king?"

"As those of Mademoiselle Tonnay Charente have made upon myself. Only think, Mademoiselle la Vallière compared the king to the sun, that is very flattering."

"But the king is not to be taught by such flatteries."

"Madam, the king is at least as much a man as he is a sun, and I saw that plainly just now, when Mademoiselle de la Vallière fell into his arms."

"La Vallière fell into the king's arms?"

"It was one of the most graceful tableaux I have ever seen. Figure to yourself that la Vallière fell backward, and that—"

"Well, what saw you then—tell me—speak?"

"I saw that which ten other persons saw at the same moment with myself; I saw that when la Vallière fell into his arms, that the king himself nearly fainted."

Madame uttered a slight cry, the only indication of her smothered anger.

"Thanks! thanks!" she cried, laughing convulsively, "you tell stories charmingly, M. de Saint Aignan."

And she hurried away alone, almost choked with rage, towards the palace.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NIGHT WANDERINGS.

MONSIEUR had separated from the princess in the best humor in the world, and as he had taken much exercise during the day, he had retired to his own apartments, leaving every one to finish the night as they pleased.

On reaching his room, Monsieur had seated himself for his night toilette with an attention which was always redoubled during his paroxysms of satisfaction.

And therefore during the whole time that his valets were undressing him, he was singing the principal airs of the ballet, played by the musicians and danced to by the king.

Then, he called for his tailors, made them show him his dresses for the following day—and, as he was well satisfied with them, he made them several presents.

At length, as the Chevalier de Lorraine, having seen him return to his

apartments, also returned, Monsieur overwhelmed the Chevalier de Lorraine with friendly expressions.

The latter, after having bowed to the prince, remained for a while silent, like a chief of sharpshooters, studying to determine upon what point he should first direct his fire; then appearing to have decided.

"Have you remarked a singular thing, monseigneur?" said he.

"No, what is it?"

"It is the cold reception which his majesty gave, in appearance, to the Count de Guiche."

"In appearance?"

"Yes, without doubt; since, in reality, he has restored him to favor."

"But I did not see that," said the prince.

"How! you did not see that, instead of sending him back into exile, as would have been perfectly natural, he authorized his singular resistance by permitting him to resume his part in the ballet?"

"And you think that the king acted wrongly, chevalier?" inquired Monsieur.

"Are you not of my opinion, prince?"

"Not altogether, my dear chevalier; and I approve the king's not having vented his rage upon an unfortunate man, who is to be considered more as insane than as evil-intentioned."

"Upon my word," replied the chevalier, "as to myself, I avow that this magnanimity astonishes me in the highest degree."

"And why so?" demanded Philippe.

"Because I should have believed the king more jealous," malignantly replied the chevalier.

During some minutes, Monsieur had felt that there was something irritating stirring beneath the words of his favorite; this last word at once fired the gunpowder.

"Jealous!" exclaimed the prince. "Jealous! What mean you by that word? Jealous of what, if you please, or jealous of whom?"

The chevalier perceived that he had allowed one of those malignant expressions which he sometimes used, to escape him. He therefore endeavored to recall it before it was beyond his reach.

"Jealous of his authority," said he, with his affected ingenuousness; "of what else would you that the king be jealous?"

"Ah!" said monseigneur, "very well."

"Did your royal highness," continued the chevalier, "request the pardon of this dear Count de Guiche?"

"Not I, faith," said Monsieur, "Guiche is a lad of wit and courage, but he has acted indiscretely with Madame, and I neither wish him harm nor good."

The chevalier was about to launch his venom against Guiche as he had endeavored to do against the king, but he thought that he perceived the weather was set fair, and that indulgence and even absolute indifference were the order of the day,—and that, in order to throw full light upon the question, he would be compelled to place the lamp close under the husband's nose.

But at this game, although people sometimes burn others, they often burn themselves.

"'Tis well! 'tis well!" said the chevalier to himself. "I will wait for de Wardes; he will do more in one day than I could in a month; for I believe, God pardon me! or rather God pardon him! that he is more jealous even than myself."

"And besides it is not de Wardes of whom I stand in need, it is an event, and in all this, I do not foresee one."

"That Guiche should have returned after having been ordered off, is a serious matter certainly; but the importance of it ceases when one reflects that Guiche has returned at a moment when Madame thinks no more of him."

"In fact, Madame thinks only of the king; that is very clear."

"But, without considering that my teeth cannot bite, and have no inducement to wish to bite the king, things are changed, and Madame cannot much longer employ her thoughts upon the king, sure, as it is said, the king no longer thinks of Madame."

"The result of all this is that we must remain quiet, and be on the watch for some new caprice, which will bring about a change."

And after thus arguing with himself, the chevalier resignedly stretched himself in the arm-chair in which Monsieur permitted him to sit in his presence, and having no more malignities to utter, the Chevalier de Lorraine's wit failed him entirely.

Very fortunately Monsieur had an abundant supply of good humor, as we have said, and he had enough for two until the moment when dismissing his

valets and officers, he went into his bed-room.

On retiring he charged the chevalier to make his compliments to Madame, and to tell her, that the moon being cool, he was afraid of the tooth-ache, and would not go down into the park during the remainder of the night.

The chevalier entered the apartment of the princess at the moment she was herself returning to it.

He executed his commission as a faithful messenger; he in the first instance, remarked the indifference, and then the confusion with which Madame received the communication from her husband.

This appeared to him to prognosticate something new.

Had Madame been going out, with so strange an air, he would have followed her.

But Madame had just come in; there was nothing therefore to be done. He twirled upon his heels like an unoccupied heron, consulted the air, the earth, the water, shook his head, and mechanically directed his steps toward the gardens.

He had not walked a hundred paces when he met two young men walking arm in arm, holding down their heads, kicking the pebbles before them which lay in their path, and who with this vague amusement accompanied their thoughts.

They were the Count de Guiche and Bragelonne.

The sight of them had its usual effect upon the Chevalier de Lorraine, the effect of instinctive repugnance.

Notwithstanding this he made them a very ceremonious bow which was returned with interest.

Then perceiving that the park was nearly deserted, that the illuminations were gradually failing, that the morning breeze was beginning to be keen, he turned to the left and re-entered the palace by the small court-yard.

De Guiche and Bragelonne turned to the right and went on towards the grand park.

At the moment when the chevalier was about to ascend the small staircase which led to the private entrance, he saw a woman followed by another woman, appear under the arcade which led from the smaller to the principal court-yard.

These two women were walking quickly, which the rustling of their silk gowns made apparent though the night was dark.

The form of cloak, the elegant shape, the mysterious and haughty deportment which distinguished these two women, and particularly the one who walked first, struck the chevalier.

"I know those two women most undoubtedly," said he to himself stopping upon the last step of the staircase.

Then as with his instinctive spirit of a bloodhound he was about to follow them, one of his lackeys who had been running in search of him for some minutes, stopped him.

"Sir," said he, "the courier has arrived."

"Well! well," replied the chevalier, "there is time enough, to-morrow will do."

"There are some urgent letters it appears, which you, sir, would perhaps be glad to see."

"Ah!" said the chevalier, "and where do they come from?"

"One comes from England, and the other from Calais; the last arrived by estafette, and appears to be of importance."

"From Calais! and who the deuce can write to me from Calais?"

"I thought I recognized the writing of your friend, the Count de Wardes."

"Oh! in that case, I will go up stairs," cried the chevalier, forgetting his projected spying expedition—"I will go up at once."

And he ascended the staircase, while the two unknown ladies disappeared at the end of the court-yard, opposite to that by which they had entered it.

We shall follow them, leaving the chevalier to his correspondence.

When he had reached the quin-conce, the lady in advance paused, rather out of breath, and raising her head cautiously:

"Are we still at a great distance from the tree?" said she.

"Oh! yes, madam, more than five hundred paces; but had you not better rest a moment here? you could not walk far at such a pace."

"You are right."

And the princess—for it was in fact Madame—leaned against a tree.

"Come now, mademoiselle," she rejoined, after having recovered her breath, "conceal nothing, tell me the whole truth."

"Oh! madam, you are already harsh with me," said the young girl, in an agitated voice.

"No, my dear Athénais; tranquilize yourself, for I am in no way angry

with you. For after all, it is no concern of mine. You feel somewhat uneasy with regard to what you may have said under that oak; you fear that you may have offended the king, and I wish to ascertain that your fears are groundless, by assuring myself that what you said could not have been heard."

"Oh! but it could, madam, the king was so near to us."

"Why surely you did not speak so loud but that some words must have been unintelligible."

"Madam, we thought ourselves completely alone."

"And there were three of you?"

"Yes, la Vallière, Montalais, and myself."

"So that you, you personally, spoke lightly of the king."

"I fear so. But in that case your highness will have the kindness to make my peace with his majesty, will you not, madam?"

"I promise you I will, should it be necessary. However, as I before told you, it is better not to anticipate an evil before being well assured that the evil has taken place. The night was dark, and darker still under those high trees. The king will not have recognized you. To inform him of it, by being the first to speak of it, would be to denounce yourself."

"Oh! madam! madam! if Mademoiselle de la Vallière has been recognized, they will have recognized me also. Moreover M. de Saint Aignan has left me no doubt on that head."

"But, in fine, did you say any thing particularly disobliging of the king?"

"By no means, madam, by no means. It was another who uttered words that were too favorable: and, consequently, my words will have contrasted with hers."

"That Montalais is so giddy," said Madame.

"Oh! it was not Montalais; she said nothing; it was la Vallière."

Madame started, as if she had not before been fully aware of the fact.

"Oh! no," said she, "the king cannot have heard it. Moreover, we will make the trial which we came out to make. Show me the oak."

And Madame again walked on.

"Do you know where it stands?" continued she.

"Alas! I know it but too well."

"And you can find your way there?"

"I can find it with my eyes shut."

"Marvellously well. You will sit down upon the bank where you were; on the bank where la Vallière was sitting, and you will speak in the same tone, and repeat the same words. I will conceal myself in the thicket, and I shall be able to tell you if you could be heard."

"Yes, madam."

"And if we find that you did really speak loud enough to be heard by the king. Well then—"

Athénais appeared to be anxiously awaiting the termination of this sentence.

"Well, then," continued Madame, in a voice that was greatly agitated, no doubt by the rapidity with which she had walked, "well, I will defend you—"

And Madame walked on more rapidly.

She suddenly stopped.

"An idea has just struck me," she cried.

"Oh! a good idea, assuredly," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente.

"Montalais must be as much in trouble as you and la Vallière."

"Less, for she is less compromised, having spoke less."

"No matter; she will assist you to get out of this dilemma by a small falsehood."

"Oh! above all, if she knows that Madame is pleased to interest herself for me."

"Very well; I think I have hit upon a plan that will help you out."

"Oh! what happiness!"

"You will say that you all three were perfectly aware that the king was concealed in the thicket, and M. de Saint Aignan, also."

"Yes, madam."

"For you must not forget, Athénais, that Saint Aignan is boasting of some very flattering words you uttered with regard to him."

"There, madam, you see that we could be heard, since M. de Saint Aignan heard what I said."

Madame perceived that she had spoken inconsiderately. She bit her lips.

"Oh! you know what Saint Aignan is," said she, "the king's favor turns his brain, and he says any thing, the most ridiculous things imaginable, and frequently even he invents. But this is not the question; did or did not the king hear? that is the point to be determined."

"Yes, madam, he undoubtedly did hear," said Athénais, in a despairing tone.

"Then do what I have said; maintain boldly that you all three knew,—mind, all three of you, for if they doubt with regard to one, they may doubt as to the others. Therefore, I say, maintain that you all three were aware of the presence of the king, and of M. Saint Aignan, and that you wished to amuse yourselves at the expense of the listeners."

"Oh! madam, at the king's expense? Oh! we should never dare to say that."

"Why, it is a jest, a mere jest. Innocent raillery is always allowed to women when men are endeavoring to surprise their secrets. In this way all will be perfectly explained. What Montalais said of Malicorne will be deemed raillery. What you said of M. de Saint Aignan—raillery. What la Vallière may have said—"

"And which she would be but too happy to recall."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Oh! yes; that I will answer for."

"Well, then, that is another reason, it was all raillery. M. Malicorne will not then have cause to be angry. M. de Saint Aignan will be confounded, for they will laugh at him instead of laughing at you. In fine, the king will be punished for indulging a curiosity so little worthy his high rank. Even if they should laugh a little at the king under such circumstances, I do not believe he would be angry at it."

"Ah! madam, you are in truth, an angel of goodness and of talent."

"It is my interest."

"How so, madam?"

"How? you ask me whether it is my interest to spare my maids of honor from being attacked by witticisms, and perhaps even calumnies. You know, dear child, the court has no indulgence for these peccadilloes, but we have been walking a long time; we must surely be near the place."

"About fifty or sixty paces further, madam; be pleased to turn to the left."

"So you are quite sure of Montalais?" said Madame.

"Oh! yes."

"She will do any thing you wish?"

"Any thing! She will be delighted."

"As to la Vallière—" the princess ventured to add—

"Oh! with regard to her it will be

more difficult. She has a repugnance to speaking falsely."

"But, however, should her interest require it?"

"I fear that would not in any way change her ideas."

"Yes, yes; I had already been informed of this. She is a very pious person; one of those affected pruders who always use religion as a cloak to conceal their own infirmities. But if she will not use this trivial subterfuge, as she will expose herself to the raillery of the whole court, as she will have provoked the king by an avowal as ridiculous as it is indecent, Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière will be pleased to think it proper that I should send her back to her rocks, so that in Touraine or the neighborhood of Blois, or I know not where, she may at perfect liberty act the sentimental damsel or the shepherdess."

These words were uttered with a vehemence and even harshness which terrified Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente.

In consequence she promised herself that, as far as regarded her, she would lie as much as might be necessary.

It was with these good intentions that Madame and her companion approached the royal oak.

"Here it is," said Athénais.

"We shall soon ascertain if people can be heard."

"Hush!" said the young girl, catching Madame by the arm, with an abruptness devoid of etiquette.

Madame paused.

"You perceive there is no difficulty in hearing?" said Athenais.

"What mean you?"

"Listen."

Madame restrained her breathing, and they indeed heard these words pronounced in a soft and melancholy tone, wafted towards them on the morning breeze.

"Oh! I tell you viscount, that I love her, madly love her; that I love her even to the death."

On hearing this voice Madame started, and beneath her hood a ray of joy illuminated her features.

She, in her turn, stopped her companion, and with cautious steps made her retreat some twenty paces; that is to say, to such a distance that she could no longer hear the voice.

"Stay here, my dear Athénais, and be sure that no one surprises us. I

think that there is some question of you in this conversation."

"Of me, Madame?"

"Yes, of you; or rather, of your adventure. I will listen; were there two of us we might be discovered. Go and seek for Montalais, and then wait for me at the border of the wood."

Then, as Athénais hesitated, she continued, "Go at once!" and in a tone which prevented further observation.

Athénais therefore arranged her rustling dress; and, by a path which led through the wood, she returned to the palace garden.

As to Madame, she secreted herself in the underwood, leaning against a gigantic chestnut tree, one of the offshoots of which had been cut down so as to form a seat.

And then, full of anxiety and fear,—

"Come, come, since one can hear from this, let us listen to what is about to be said of me to M. de Bragelonne by that other amorous madman who is called the Count de Guiche."

CHAPTER XL.

IN WHICH MADAME IS CONVINCED THAT BY LISTENING YOU MAY HEAR WHAT IS SAID.

THERE WAS a moment's silence, as if all the mysterious noises of the night had hushed themselves that Madame might hear this juvenile and amorous confidence.

It was Raoul who first spoke.

He was leaning listlessly against the trunk of the great oak, and replied in his soft and harmonious voice—

"Alas! my dear Guiche, it is a great misfortune."

"Oh! yes," exclaimed the count, "a very great one."

"You do not hear me, Guiche; or rather I should say, you do not understand me. I say that a great misfortune has befallen you; not that you love, but because you know not how to conceal your love."

"And how so!" cried Guiche.

"Yes, there is one thing which you do not perceive; it is that now it is not solely to your only friend—that is to say, to a man who would suffer death rather than betray you—you do not, say, perceive that it is not only your friend whom you make the cou

fidant of your love, but even the first comer."

"The first comer!" exclaimed Guiche; "are you mad, Bragelonne, that you say such things?"

"But it is even so."

"Impossible! How and in what manner can I have become indiscreet to such a degree as that?"

"I mean to say, my friend, that your eyes, your gestures, your sighs, speak in despite of you; that every exaggerated passion conducts and hurries a man beyond self-control. Thenthisman, losing all self-command, becomes the prey of a madness which induces him to recount his sorrows to the trees, to the air, to the wild animals of the wood, when he can no longer find an intelligent being within hearing. Therefore, my dear friend, remember this—that it rarely happens that there is not some one by, and particularly when things are said which ought not to be heard."

Guiche sighed profoundly.

"There, now," said Bragelonne, "at this moment I feel pained for you; since your return here you have a hundred times and in a hundred different ways given evidence of your love for her; and even supposing this had not been the case, your return, of itself, would have been a dreadful indiscretion. I therefore come to this conclusion, that if you do not keep more guard upon yourself the day will arrive that will bring about an explosion. Who then can save you? Speak! answer me. Who will be able to save her? for innocent as she may be of your love, your love will be a weapon in the hands of her enemies, to be directed against her."

"Oh! good heaven!" murmured Guiche, and a profound sigh accompanied his words.

"That is not answering me, dear Guiche."

"Yes, but it is."

"Come, now, what is your answer?"

"Well, then, I reply, that when that day comes my life will not be more extinct than it is now."

"I do not understand you."

"Yes, so many alternations have exhausted me. I am no longer a thinking, acting being. No man, however insignificant he may be, but is superior to myself. My last strength has this day been extinguished and I renounce the struggle. When in the camp, as we have been together, and one goes

out alone to reconnoitre we sometimes meet a party of five or six foragers, and although alone, we defend ourselves against them; then, there come six others, we get irritated and still we persevere; but should there come six, eight, ten others, we begin to spur our horse, if we have still a horse, or get ourselves killed rather than fly. Well, then, I am in that position. I first of all combated with myself, then against Buckingham, now, the king has presented himself, I will not combat against the king, nor even, I hasten to say to you, should the king withdraw, nor even against the disposition of that woman. Oh! I do not deceive myself; once having entered the service of that love, I shall devote myself to death."

"It is not to her you should address reproaches," said Raoul, "but to yourself."

"And why?"

"Now, you know the princess. Somewhat capricious, perhaps; admiring every thing that's new, eager after praise, even should praise be uttered by a blind man or a child. You take fire, and to a degree that must consume you. Look at the woman, love her, for no one whose heart is not engaged elsewhere can look at her without loving her. But although loving her, respect in her, in the first place, the exalted rank of her husband, then herself, then, lastly, your own personal safety."

"Thanks, Raoul."

"And for what?"

"That as my sufferings all proceed from this same woman, you console me by saying all the good you think of her, and perhaps more than you really think."

"Oh!" exclaimed Raoul, "you are mistaken, Guiche; what I think I do not always say, but then I say nothing; but when I do speak I know not how either to feign or to deceive, and who listens to me may believe me."

During this time Madame, with outstretched neck and anxious ears, her eyes dilated by peering through the obscurity, was eagerly inhaling the slight breeze that whispered through the branches.

"Then I know her better than you do!" cried Guiche; "she is not capricious, she is frivolous; she is not enraptured with novelty, she has no faith, no memory; she is not merely and purely fond of praise, but she is a

coquette, with refinement and cruelty. Mortally coquette! oh! yes, I know that full well. Believe me, Bragelonne, I suffer all the torments of the infernal regions. Though brave, and passionately fond of danger, I have found a danger greater than my strength or courage. But, see you, Raoul, I reserve to myself a victory which shall cost her many tears."

Raoul looked at his friend, and as the latter, almost choked by emotion, threw back his head against the trunk of the oak.

"A victory!" said he, "what victory?"

"What victory. Yes, I will one day accost her. I will say to her, I was young, I was mad with love, I had, however, so much respect, that I fell down at your feet, and had remained there, my face buried in the dust, had not your looks raised me high as your hand. I thought I understood your looks; I arose, and then, without having done any thing further than to love you still more, if that were possible, then you wantonly struck me to the earth by a caprice. 'Twas you did this, Oh! woman without heart, without faith, without love. You are not worthy, princess though you are, and of blood royal, you are not worthy of the love of an honest man. And I punish myself with death for having too much loved you, and die detesting you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Raoul, terrified by the accents of profound sincerity, in which these words were uttered, "oh! I too truly told you, Guiche, that you are mad."

"Yes, yes," continued Guiche, pursuing his idea, "since we have no more wars here, I will go yonder to the north, and get admitted into the service of the empire, and some Hungarian, some Croatian, some Turk, will be charitable enough to send a ball through me—"

Guiche did not conclude, or rather as he was concluding a noise made him start, and Raoul jumped to his feet at the same instant.

As to Guiche, absorbed by what he was then saying and his thoughts, he remained seated, pressing his head between his hands.

The rushing noise continued, and a woman appeared before the two young friends, pale and agitated. With one hand she put aside the branches which would have struck her face, and

and with the other she raised the hood of the cloak with which her shoulders were covered. By those tearful though brilliant eyes, by that royal deportment, by the haughtiness of her sovereign gestures, and still more by the beatings of his own heart, Guiche recognized Madame, and uttering a shriek, removed his hands from his temples to cover his eyes.

Raoul trembling, and Guiche out of countenance, stammered out some vague formula of respect, rolling his beaver in his agitated hands.

"M. de Bragelonne," said the princess, "be pleased to see if my women are not somewhere out yonder, either in the avenues or the mall, and you, count, remain with me; I am tired, and you will give me your arm."

A thunder-bolt falling at the young man's feet would have less terrified him than these cold, severe words.

Nevertheless, as he was brave as he had said but a few moments before, as he had just resolved on the line of conduct he should adopt, Guiche stood up, and seeing that Bragelonne hesitated, gave him a glance replete with resignation and supreme gratitude.

Instead of immediately replying to Madame, he even advanced a step towards the count, and holding out the hand which the princess had demanded, he pressed the faithful hand of his friend with a sigh, in which he gave to friendship all that remained of life within his heart.

Madame waited; she so proud, she so little accustomed to be kept waiting, until this mute colloquy had ended.

Her hand, her royal hand, remained suspended in the air, and when Raoul was gone, fell without anger, but not without emotion, into that of Guiche.

They were alone in the depths of the dark mute forest, and nothing was heard but the steps of Raoul, who was precipitately retiring by the shadowy paths.

Over their heads was spread the thick and perfumed arches of the foliage of the forest, through the interstices of which, here and there sparkled a brilliant star.

Madame gently drew Guiche away from this indiscreet tree, which had heard, and allowed to be heard; so many things during this eventful evening, and led him about a hundred yards to an open spot, which allowed them to see around them to a certain distance.

"I have brought you here," said she, tremblingly, "because there, where we were, every word can be heard."

"Every word can be heard, did you say, madam?" mechanically replied the young man.

"Yes."

"By which you imply," murmured Guiche,

"Which means to imply that I heard every word you uttered."

"Oh! great God! great God! that alone was wanting," stammered Guiche.

And he bent down his head as does the tired swimmer beneath the wave that engulfs him.

"And thus," said she, "you judge of me as you said."

Guiche turned pale, averted his face, and made no reply; he felt near fainting.

"Tis very well," continued the princess in a tone of voice, full of sweetness, "I like this frankness which ought to wound me, better than flattery which might deceive me. Be it so! according to you then, M. de Guiche, I am a vile coquette."

"Vile!" exclaimed the young man, "you, vile, oh! certainly I did not say, I could not have said that that which is most precious to me in this world, was vile; no, no, I did not say that."

"A woman who sees a man perishing, consumed by a flame she has ignited and who does not extinguish that flame, is, in my opinion a vile woman."

"Oh! of what importance to you can be any thing I have said?" rejoined the count. What am I, in comparison with you, and why should you feel any anxiety whether I do, or, do not exist?"

"Monsieur de Guiche, you are a man as I am a woman, and knowing you as I know you, I will not be accessory to your death. With regard to you I shall change both my conduct and my character. I will be, not only frank, for that I always am, but truthful; I entreat you therefore, count, to love me no longer, and to forget completely that I have ever addressed to you either a word or look."

Guiche turned towards her, gazing at her with eyes full of passion.

"You," said he, "you offer me apologies, you entreat me,—you?"

"Yes, undoubtedly, since I have done the evil, it is my duty to repair the evil. Therefore, count, it is agreed upon, you will pardon me my frivolity, my coquetry—nay, do not interrupt

me—I will forgive you, for having said that I was coquettish and frivolous, and something worse perhaps, and you will renounce your idea of dying, and will preserve for your family, for the king and for the ladies, a cavalier whom all the world esteems and whom many love."

And Madame pronounced this last word with such an accent of frankness and even tenderness that the heart of the young man seemed ready to burst forth from his breast.

"Oh! madam! madam!" stammered he.

"Hear me, still," she continued, "when you have renounced me, in the first place from necessity, and secondly, in order to accede to my entreaty, then you will judge me better, and I feel assured will exchange this love—pardon me, this folly—for a sincere friendship, which you will come and offer to me, and which I swear to you, shall be cordially accepted."

Guiche, the perspiration streaming from his forehead, death in his heart, a shudder running through every vein, bit his lips, stamped his feet and, in a word, was devoured by grief.

"Madam," cried he, "that which you offer me is impossible, I accept no such compact."

"What! cried Madame, "you refuse my friendship?"

"No! no! I want not friendship, madam, I would rather die of love than live with friendship."

"Count—"

"Oh! madam," exclaimed Guiche. "I have arrived at that agonizing moment when there exists no other consideration, no other respect than the respect and consideration of an honest man towards an adored woman. Drive me from you, curse me, denounce me, it will all be just. I have complained of you, but I only complained so bitterly because I loved you. I have told you that I should die, I will die. Living, you would forget me, but if I die I am certain you will not forget me."

And yet she who was then standing erect and lost in thought, as agitated as was the young count, for a moment averted her face, as he a moment before had done.

Then after a silence of some seconds, "You love me much then," said Madame.

"Oh! madly, to such a degree that I shall die from it, as you said. It will kill me, whether you drive me

from you, or should consent still to listen to me."

"Then 'tis a malady without hope of cure," said she, in a lively tone, "a malady which must be treated by administering emollients. Come now, give me your hand—it is cold as ice."

Guiche knelt down, pressing his lips not only to one but to both of Madame's burning hands.

"Well then, love me," said the princess, "since it cannot be otherwise."

And she, almost imperceptibly, pressed his fingers, raising him up, with somewhat of the majesty of a queen, somewhat also of the affection of a loving woman.

De Guiche trembled in every nerve.

Madame felt this tremor coursing through the young man's veins, and felt assured that this one at least sincerely loved.

"Your arm, count, and let us return to the palace."

"Ah! madam!" cried the count, staggering, dazzled, for a cloud of flame seemed to dance before his eyes, "ah! you have found a third means of killing me."

"Fortunately it is the most protracted," replied she. "Is it not so?"

And she drew him towards the mall.

CHAPTER XLI.

ARAMIS'S CORRESPONDENCE.

WHILE Guiche's affairs were thus suddenly meliorated, without his being able to divine the cause of such melioration, and had taken the unexpected turn which we have seen them take, Raoul having understood Madame's look, had retired in order not to interrupt an explanation of which he was far from imagining the result, and had rejoined the ladies of honor who were scattered about the garden.

During this time, the Chevalier de Lorraine, having gone up to his room, with some surprise had read the letter from de Wardes, who related to him, or rather had used the hand of his valet de chambre to relate to him, his rencontre with Buckingham, the wound he had received, and all the details of that adventure, requesting him to communicate to Guiche, and to Monsieur, such portions of it as might be most particularly disagreeable to each of them.

De Wardes, above all, endeavored to

demonstrate to the chevalier the extreme energy of the passion which Buckingham entertained for Madame, and he concluded his letter by announcing that he believed this passion was reciprocal.

On reading this last paragraph, the chevalier raised his shoulders with a contemptuous shrug, and, indeed, de Wardes was dreadfully behind the age, as has been clearly shown.

De Wardes had got no further than Buckingham.

The chevalier threw the letter over his shoulder on to a table which stood close by, and in a disdainful tone—

"In truth," said he, "it is incredible; this poor de Wardes is nevertheless a lad of spirit, and yet it would not seem so; a man soon gets rusty in the country. May the devil fly away with this simpleton, who ought to have written to me on important matters, and who communicates such miserable triflings. Instead of this stupid letter which means absolutely nothing, I had expected to find that he had managed to get into some nice little intrigue down yonder which had compromised a woman, had given rise to a pretty little duel, in which he had killed his man, and other interesting details that would have amused Monsieur for three whole days."

He looked at his watch

"Now," said he, "it is too late. It is one o'clock, and every body must have gone to the king's apartments where the night is to be concluded. Come, I have lost the scent, unless, indeed, some extraordinary chance—"

And saying these words as if he wished to consult his lucky star, the chevalier approached the window which looked out on a rather secluded part of the garden.

Instantly, and as if some evil genius had been at his command, he perceived, returning to the palace in company with a man, a lady, in a dark colored cloak, and recognized the form which had so much attracted his attention some half hour previously.

"By Jupiter," thought he, clapping his hands, "that is my mysterious incognita."

And he precipitately rushed down the staircase, in the hope of reaching the court-yard in time to recognize the lady of the cloak and her companion.

But on reaching the gate of the smaller court-yard he almost ran against Madame, whose radiant countenance

seemed full of revelations beneath the hood which sheltered, but did not conceal her face.

Unfortunately for the chevalier Madame was alone.

The chevalier comprehended that since he had seen her, not two minutes before, accompanied by a gentleman, the gentleman could not be at any very great distance.

In consequence, he scarcely gave himself time to take off his hat to the princess, though he drew up on one side to let her pass; then after she had proceeded some steps with the rapidity of a woman who fears to be recognized, when the chevalier saw that she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to pay any attention to him, he rushed into the garden, casting about him rapid glances, and embracing as much of its horizon as his eyes could scope.

He arrived in time. The gentleman who had accompanied Madame was still in sight, but he was near one of the wings of the palace, behind which he was about to disappear.

There was not a moment to be lost. The chevalier hastened full tilt in pursuit of him, knowing that he could slacken his pace when he had got near to the unknown; but notwithstanding his great speed the stranger had turned the corner of the building before he could come up with him.

However, it was evident, that as the person the chevalier was pursuing was walking gently, in deep thought, with head bowed down, either beneath the weight of grief or happiness, could he once reach the corner, unless, indeed, he should go into some door, the chevalier could not fail to catch him.

And this would certainly have happened if, at the very moment that he turned the corner he had not run against two persons who were coming round it from the opposite direction.

The chevalier was about to handle rather roughly these two untimely intruders when, on raising his head, he recognized the superintendent of finance.

Fouquet was accompanied by a person whom the chevalier now saw for the first time.

This person was his grace, the bishop of Vannes.

Restrained by the importance of the personage, and compelled by propriety to make excuses where he had expected to receive them, and as M. Fouquet commanded, 'f not the friendship, at

all events the respect of every one attached to the court; as the king himself, although he was rather his enemy than his friend, always treated M. Fouquet as a man of high distinction, the chevalier did as the king would have done, he bowed to M. Fouquet, who returned his salutation with benevolent politeness, seeing that the gentlemen had run against him accidentally and without any ill intention.

Then, almost immediately, having recognized the Chevalier de Lorraine, he paid him some compliments, to which the chevalier was naturally compelled to comply.

However brief this dialogue the Chevalier de Lorraine saw with mortal vexation that his unknown was gradually disappearing in the darkness.

The chevalier resigned himself to his fate; and once resigned, he devoted his undivided attention to Fouquet.

"Ah! sir," said he, "how long you have delayed. Your absence has been the subject of much remark; and I heard Monsieur express his astonishment that, having been invited by the king, you had not come."

"It was altogether impossible, sir; but the moment I was at liberty I came."

"Paris is quiet?"

"Perfectly so. Paris has expressed no discontent at the new tax."

"Ah! I can comprehend that you wished to assure yourself of this good will, before coming to partake of our festivities."

"I nevertheless have arrived very late. I will therefore address myself to you, sir, to inquire whether the king is in the grounds, or in the palace; whether I can see him to-night, or must wait till morning."

"We have lost sight of the king for the last half hour," replied the chevalier.

"He is, perhaps, in Madame's apartments?" inquired Fouquet.

I do not think it probable, for I have only this minute met Madame, who was coming in by the private staircase; and unless the gentleman whom you just now passed was the king in person—"

And the chevalier paused, hoping in this way to be informed of the name of the person whom he had been pursuing.

But Fouquet, whether he had recognized Guiche or not, merely replied:

"No, sir, it was not the king."

The disappointed chevalier again bowed; but, while bowing, having cast his eyes around him—having perceived M. Colbert in the midst of a group—

“See, sir,” said he to the superintendent, “yonder under the trees is some one, who will give you more certain information than I can.”

“Who is it?” asked Fouquet, whose weak sight could not distinguish any one at such a distance.

“M. Colbert,” replied the chevalier.

“Ah! very well. That person yonder, who is speaking to those men carrying torches—is that M. Colbert?”

“Himself: he is giving orders for to-morrow to the persons who put up the illuminations.”

“I thank you, sir.”

And Fouquet made a sign with his head that he had learned all he wished to know.

On his side, the chevalier, who had learned nothing, withdrew with a profound salutation.

He had scarcely withdrawn when Fouquet, knitting his brow, fell into a mute revery.

Aramis looked at him for a moment with compassionating sorrow.

Well!” said he to him, “you are now moved merely from hearing that man’s name. What! triumphant and joyous as you were but now, you allow yourself to be cast down by the appearance of this unimportant phantom! Come now, sir, have you faith in your own fortune?”

“No!” replied Fouquet, gloomily.

“And why not?”

“Because I am too happy at this moment,” replied he in a trembling voice. “Ah! my dear d’Herblay, you who are so learned, you ought to know the history of a certain tyrant of Samos. What can I cast into the sea to disarm threatening misfortune? Oh! I repeat to you, my friend, I am too happy! so happy! that I desire nothing more than that I now possess—I have risen so high—you know my device: *Quo non ascendam*. I have risen so high, that I can now only descend. It is therefore impossible I can believe in the progression of a fortune which is already more than human.”

Aramis smiled, fixing on Fouquet his penetrating but consoling eyes.

“Were I acquainted with your happiness,” said he, “I might perhaps fear your disgrace; but you consider me as a true friend; that is to say, you think me useful only in misfortune, and that

is all. That is of itself an immense privilege, and I feel it; but, in truth, I have a right to ask you to confide to me, now and then, the happy events which fall to your share, and in which you know I should feel as great an interest as if they happened to myself.”

“My dear prelate,” said Fouquet, laughing, “my secrets are of rather too profane a nature to be confided to a bishop, mundane as he may be.”

“Pooh! but in confession!”

“Oh! I should blush too much were you my confessor.”

And Fouquet sighed.

Aramis again looked at him, but without any other expression than his mute smile.

“Well! well!” said he, “discretion is a wonderfully great virtue.”

“Silence!” said Fouquet. “Here is this venomous reptile, who has perceived me, and is coming towards us.”

“Colbert?”

“Yes; withdraw a little, my dear d’Herblay. I would not that this miserable fellow should see you with me—he would take an aversion to you.”

Aramis pressed his hand.

“What need have I of his friendship!” said he, “are you not here?”

“Yes; but perhaps I shall not be here always,” replied Fouquet, in a melancholy tone.

“On that day—should that day ever arrive,” said Aramis very tranquilly—“we shall take measures to do without the friendship or to brave the aversion of M. Colbert. But tell me, my dear Monsieur Fouquet, whether, instead of conversing with this miserable fellow, as you did him the honor to call him—a conversation of which I cannot perceive the utility—you were at once to repair, if not to the king, at all events to Madame?”

“To Madame!” said the superintendent, somewhat absently, for he was thinking on other matters, “yes—undoubtedly—to Madame.”

“You will remember,” continued Aramis, “that we were informed of the great favor Madame has enjoyed during the last two or three days. It would befit your policy and our plans, that you should pay assiduous court to his majesty’s friends. It would be a means for counterbalancing M. Colbert’s new born authority. Repair therefore as soon as possible to Madame, and obtain for us this ally.”

“But,” said Fouquet, “are you quite certain that it is really upon her

that the king's eyes are at this moment fixed?"

"If the needle should have turned, it must be since this morning. You know that I have my police."

"Well then, I will go at once, and at all events I have my means of introduction; it is a magnificent pair of antique cameos set in diamonds."

"I have seen them; nothing can be richer or more royal."

They were interrupted at this moment by a lackey, conducting a courier.

"This for his lordship the superintendent," said the courier loudly, presenting a letter to Fouquet.

"This for monseigneur the bishop of Vannes," said the lackey in a whisper, delivering a note to Aramis.

And as the lackey bore a torch, he placed it between the superintendent and the bishop that they might both read at the same time.

On seeing the small close writing on the envelope, Fouquet started with joy; those who love, or who have loved, could alone comprehend his anxiety in the first instance, and his subsequent delight.

He eagerly unsealed the letter, which contained only these few words:

"It is an hour since I left thee; it is an age since I told thee that I loved thee."

And this was all.

Madame de Bellière, had in fact, left Fouquet, but an hour before writing these words after having spent two days with him, and for fear that the remembrance of her should be too long driven from the heart she regretted, she had sent the courier, the bearer of this important missive.

Fouquet kissed the letter, and paid for it with a handful of gold.

As to Aramis, he, on his side was reading, as we have said, but with more coolness and reflection, the following note.

"The king has this evening been struck with a strange blow; a woman loves him. This he has learnt by accident, by listening to the conversation of this young girl and her companions. So that the king has given himself up entirely to this new caprice. The lady is called Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and is rather of too inferior beauty to allow it to be supposed that this caprice will become a lasting passion."

"Beware of Mademoiselle de la Vallière"

Not a word of Madame.

Aramis slowly folded up the note and put it in his pocket.

As to Fouquet he was still inhaling with delight the perfume of his letter.

"My lord," said Aramis, touching Fouquet's arm.

"Hey!" cried the latter, starting.

"An idea has struck me. Do you know a little girl named la Vallière?"

"Not I, faith."

"Try to remember."

"Ah! yes—one of Madame's maids of honor, I believe."

"It must be that."

"Well! and what then?"

"Well, my lord, it is to that little girl you must pay a visit to-night."

"Bah! and how?"

"And what is more, it is to that little girl that you must give your cameos."

"You are jesting, surely."

"You know, my lord, that I give good advice."

"But this unforeseen—"

"That is my affair. Quick, you must pay regular court to this little la Vallière, I will be your surety with Madame de Bellière, that this courtship is purely political."

"What say you there, my friend!" earnestly exclaimed Fouquet, "and what name have you uttered?"

"A name which ought to prove to you, my lord superintendent, that being well informed with regard to you, I may be as well informed with regard to others. Pay your court to this little la Vallière."

"I will pay court to whom you will," replied Fouquet, the happiness of paradise thrilling in his heart.

"Come, come, pray re-descend to earth, you traveller in the seventh heaven," said Aramis, "for here comes M. Colbert. But, see, he has been recruiting while we were reading; he is surrounded, praised, congratulated, decidedly he is a sovereign power."

And Colbert was indeed advancing, escorted by all the courtiers who had remained in the gardens, and each of them complimenting him on the management of the fêtes which swelled his pride almost to bursting.

"If la Fontaine were here," said Fouquet smiling, "what a capital opportunity he would have for reciting his fable of the frog who wished to become as big as a bull?"

Colbert arrived, surrounded by a circle of dazzling light. Fouquet awaited him with perfect calmness.

a slightly sarcastic smile playing around his lips.

Colbert was also smiling; he had perceived his enemy during the last quarter of an hour, and had approached him in a tortuous direction.

Colbert's smile was significant of hostility.

"Ho! ho!" said Aramis, in a whisper to the superintendent, "the rascal is about to ask you again for some few millions, to pay for his fire-works and colored lamps."

Colbert bowed first, and with an air which he constrained himself to appear respectful.

Fouquet scarcely moved his head.

"Well, monseigneur!" inquired Colbert, what say your eyes? have we evinced good taste?"

"Perfect taste," replied Fouquet, and not the slightest shade of irony could be perceived in his tone of voice.

"Oh!" cried Colbert, malignantly, "you are pleased to be indulgent. We are poor people, we who belong to the king, and Fontainebleau is not a residence to be compared to Vaux."

"That is true," phlegmatically replied Fouquet, before whom all the other actors in this scene bowed down.

"How can it be otherwise, my lord?" continued Colbert, "we have managed matters in conformity with our inferior resources."

Fouquet made a gesture of assent.

"But," pursued Colbert, "it would be worthy your magnificence to offer a fête to his majesty in your marvellous gardens; in those gardens which have cost you sixty millions."

"Seventy-two," said Fouquet.

"A still more urgent reason," rejoined Colbert; "that would in truth be magnificent."

"But do you believe sir," said Fouquet, "that his majesty would deign to accept my invitation?"

"Oh! I have not the slightest doubt of it," eagerly replied Colbert; "I would even guarantee it."

"It is very amiable on your part," said Fouquet, "I may then count upon it."

"Yes, sir, yes; most positively."

"Then I will reflect upon it."

"Accept! accept at once!" eagerly whispered Aramis.

"You will reflect upon it?" said Colbert inquiringly.

"Yes," replied Fouquet, "in order that I may determine on the day on which I should invite the king."

"Do it this very evening," continued Aramis in the same tone.

"Agreed!" said the superintendent. "Gentlemen," said he, addressing the surrounding courtiers, "I would invite you all at once, but you know where the king goes there he alone is master. You must therefore obtain an invitation from his majesty."

A joyous rumor spread through the whole throng.

Fouquet bowed and left them.

"Miserable, ostentatious man," said Colbert aside, "you accept the proposal and you know it will cost you ten millions."

"You have ruined me!" said Fouquet, in a whisper to Aramis.

"I have saved you," replied the latter, while Fouquet was ascending the front steps of the palace, who then sent in to ask the king if he was still visible.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ORDERLY CLERK.

THE king, anxious to be alone that he might study the feelings of his own heart, had withdrawn to his apartment, where he remained communing with himself until M. de Saint Aignan joined him after his conversation with Madame.

We have already reported this conversation.

The favorite, proud of his two-fold importance, and feeling that within the two last hours he had become the confidant of the king, began, respectful as he naturally was, to treat lightly court affairs, and from the height he had attained, or rather to which chance had elevated him, he saw nothing but love with its rosy garlands all around him.

The love of the king for Madame, that of Madame for the king, that of Guiche for Madame, that of la Vallière for the king, that of Malicorne for Montalais, that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente for him, Saint Aignan—was not all this, in truth, more than sufficient to turn the head of a courtier?

Now, Saint Aignan was the model of all courtiers, past, present, and to come.

Moreover, Saint Aignan had shown himself so good a connoisseur, so

subtle an appreciator, that the king listened to him, evincing great interest, particularly when he related the urgent manner in which Madame had sought him out to converse with him in relation to the affairs of Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

Even had the king felt no longer the interest which he had entertained for Madame Henrietta, there was in this order of the princess to obtain these particulars a gratification to his self-love which he could not do otherwise than feel; he therefore enjoyed this satisfaction, but that was all, and his heart was not even for a moment alarmed as to what Madame might or might not think of the whole of this adventure.

Only when Saint-Aignan had concluded, the king while engaged in preparing for his night toilette asked:

"Now, Saint-Aignan, you know who and what Mademoiselle de la Vallière is?"

"Not only what she is, but what she will be?"

"What mean you by that?"

"I mean to say that she is all a woman can desire to be, beloved by your majesty; I mean to say that she will be all your majesty may desire she shall be."

"It is not that I ask of you, I do not want to know what she is, nor what she will be; you have already said it, that is my affair; I want to know what she was yesterday. Tell me therefore what is said of her."

"It is said that she is virtuous."

"Oh!" said the king smiling, "that is a mere rumor."

"But one sufficiently rare, sire, at our court for it to be believed when it is asserted."

"You are perhaps right, my dear Saint-Aignan,—and of good family?"

"Excellent, daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, and step-daughter of that excellent M. de Saint-Rémy."

"Ah! yes, my aunt's major-domo. I recollect that, and now remember that I saw her when I passed through Blois. She was presented to me by my aunt, and I have even to reproach myself with not having, at that time, paid her all the attention she deserved."

"Oh! sire, I can venture to say that your majesty will soon make up for lost time."

"The rumor is then that Mademoiselle de la Vallière has no lover?"

"Be that as it may, I do not believe that your majesty will be much alarmed at any rivalry."

"Stay! stay!" cried the king, suddenly, with a most serious accent.

"What is your pleasure, sire?"

"I remember—"

"Ah!"

"If she have no lover, she is betrothed."

"Betrothed."

"How! you know not that, count?"

"No."

"You, who know every thing."

"Your majesty will pardon me, but do you know the man to whom she is betrothed?"

"Indeed I do. Why his father came to ask me to sign the marriage contract. It is"—the king was doubtless about to pronounce the name of the Viscount de Bragelonne, but he suddenly paused, and knit his brow.

"It is repeated Saint-Aignan."

"I no longer remember the name," replied Louis XIV. endeavoring to conceal his emotion, which he had much trouble to restrain.

"Can I assist your majesty's memory in any way?"

"No, for I no longer know of whom I was then thinking—I remember vaguely that one of the maids of honor was asked in marriage, but the name escapes me."

"Was it Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente that he was to marry?" inquired Saint-Aignan, eagerly.

"Perhaps it was so," replied the king.

"Then the intended husband was M. de Montespan. But Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente did not, it appears to me, speak of him in a way to alarm any other pretenders."

"In fine," resumed the king, "I know nothing or next to nothing with regard to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Saint-Aignan I request you to obtain all the information you can respecting her."

"Yes, sire, and when shall I have the honor of seeing your majesty to communicate it?"

"When you shall have obtained it."

"And that shall be soon, if the information can be acquired with a rapidity that shall respond to the eagerness of my desire to see your majesty."

"Tis well said. By-the-by, did Madame evince any feeling of anger against this poor little girl?"

"In no way, sire."

"Then Madame was not angry?"

"I cannot say, but she was laughing the whole time."

"Very well, but it appears to me I hear some noise in the ante-chambers, they are coming, undoubtedly, to inform me of the arrival of some courier."

"I hear a voice, assuredly."

"Then inquire what it is, Saint-Aignan."

The count ran to the door and exchanged a few words with the usher.

"Sire," said he, as he returned, "it is M. Fouquet who has arrived this moment, in consequence, he says, of an order from the king. He has presented himself, but at this late hour, he does not insist upon an audience to-night. He wished only to report his presence here."

"M. Fouquet! why I wrote to him at three o'clock inviting him to be here next day, and he has arrived at two in the morning. This is zeal!" cried the king delighted at having been so promptly obeyed. "Well! on the contrary, M. Fouquet shall have his audience, I commanded his attendance and will receive him. Let him be introduced."

"As for you, count, be vigilant as to the inquiries, and farewell till tomorrow."

The king placed his finger upon his lips and Saint-Aignan, his heart overflowing with joy retired, giving the order to the usher to introduce M. Fouquet.

Fouquet then entered the royal chamber, Louis XIV. rose to receive him.

"Good evening, M. Fouquet," said he, with a gracious smile, "I congratulate you on your punctuality: my message must, however have reached you at a late hour."

"At nine in the evening, sire."

"You must have been much occupied these last few days, M. Fouquet, for I have been assured you had not left your study at Saint Mandé for three or four days."

"I have been closely shut up for three days," replied Fouquet, bowing.

"Do you know, M. Fouquet, that I had many things to say to you?" continued the king, with kind expression.

"Your majesty overwhelms me, and since you are so generous towards me, will you allow me to remind you of a promise which you made with regard to an audience?"

"Ah! yes; some person in the

church who conceives he has to thank me. Is it not so?"

"Precisely, sire. The hour is perhaps ill chosen; but the time of the person whom I have brought with me is precious, and as Fontainebleau is on the road to his diocese—"

"Who is it then?"

"The present bishop of Vannes, whom your majesty, on my recommendation, deigned to invest about three months ago."

"That is possible," said the king, who had signed the preferment without reading it, "is he here?"

"Yes, sire; Vannes is an important diocese, the flock of this pastor stand in need of his utmost care: they are savages, whom it is necessary to polish by constantly instructing them, and M. d'Herblay has not his equal in missions of that nature."

"Monsieur d'Herblay," said the king, seemingly endeavoring to catch some vague remembrance, as if that name, heard some years before, was now unknown to him.

"Oh!" cried Fouquet, eagerly, "your majesty does not know the obscure name of one of your most valuable subjects."

"No; I acknowledge it. And he wishes to return there."

"That is to say he received letters this morning which may oblige him to return, so that before setting out for that lost country which is called Brittany, he is desirous to present his respects to your majesty."

"And he is waiting?"

"He is there, sire."

"Let him come in."

Fouquet made a sign to the usher who was waiting behind the tapestry.

The door was opened, and Aramis entered.

The king allowed him to address his compliments to him, fixing upon his noble countenance a long and penetrating look.

"Vannes!" said the king, "you are the Bishop of Vannes, sir?"

"Yes, sire."

"Vannes is in Brittany?"

Aramis bowed.

"Near the sea?"

Aramis again bowed.

"Some leagues from Belle-Isle?"

"Yes, sire, about six leagues, I believe."

"Six leagues! that is but a step," said Louis XIV.

"Not for us, Bretons, sire," said

Aramis. Six leagues, on the contrary, is a distance, even on land; if six leagues by sea, 'tis an immensity. And as I have the honor to tell the king, they count it six leagues by sea from the river to Belle-Isle."

"It is said that Monsieur Fouquet has a very fine house at Belle-Isle," observed the king.

"Yes, I have heard so," calmly replied Aramis, looking at Fouquet.

"How—you have only heard so!" exclaimed the king.

"Yes, sire."

"In truth, Monsieur Fouquet, there is one thing which astonishes me, and I acknowledge it."

"What is that, sire?"

"How! you have at the head of your parishes such a man as M. d'Herblay, and you have not shown him Belle-Isle."

"Oh! sire," replied the bishop, without giving Fouquet time to answer, "we poor Breton prelates—we have the habit of residing in our dioceses."

"M. de Vannes," said the king, "I will punish M. Fouquet for his negligence."

"And how so, sire?"

"I will translate you."

Fouquet bit his lips: Aramis smiled.

"How much does Vannes bring in," continued the king.

"Six thousand livres, sire," said Aramis.

"What, good Heaven! so little? But you have property, M. de Vannes?"

"I have nothing, sire: but M. de Fouquet pays me twelve hundred livres a year for his pew."

"Come, come, M. d'Herblay, I will promise you something better than that."

"Sire—"

"I will think of something for you."

Aramis bowed.

On his side the king bowed to him respectfully; which, moreover, was his custom with regard to women and to persons of the church.

Aramis understood that his audience was terminated. He took leave with a simple phrase; by a phrase appropriate to a real country pastor, and then retired.

"That is a remarkable countenance," said the king, following him with his eyes as long as he could see him, and even, we may say, when he could no longer see him.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "had he received a regular education, not a single prelate in the kingdom would deserve the first distinctions so much as he does."

"Is he not learned, then?"

"He exchanged the sword for the cassock, and that rather late in life; but that matters; not if your majesty will permit me in proper time and place to speak to you again of M. de Vannes."

"I beg you will do so; but before speaking of him let us speak of yourself, M. Fouquet."

"Of me, sire?"

"Yes; I have a thousand compliments to address to you."

"I cannot express to your majesty the joy with which you overwhelm me."

"Yes, M. Fouquet, understand me. I had formed some prejudices against you."

"Then I have been indeed unfortunate, sire."

"But they are now dispelled. Did you not perceive it?"

"Yes sire, I did; but I with resignation awaited the light of day and truth. It appears that the day has now arrived."

"Ah! you knew you were in disfavor."

"Alas! yes, sire."

"And do you know why?"

"Perfectly. The king thought me a defaulter."

"Oh! no."

"Or rather an unskilful administrator. In fine, your majesty thought that the people not having money, the king would not have any either."

"Yes, I did believe so; but I am undeceived."

Fouquet bowed.

"And no rebellion, no complaints?"

"And money in abundance," added Fouquet.

"The fact is, that you were even prodigal towards me during the last month."

"I have enough still, not merely for the absolute wants, but even for the caprices of your majesty."

"Thank heaven! M. Fouquet," replied the king, seriously, "I shall not put you to the test. From this time, for two months, I will not apply to you for any thing."

"I shall take advantage of this to amass for the king's service some five or six millions which will be useful to him to pay his first expenses in the event of a war."

"Five or six millions!"

"For his household only, be it understood."

"You think then we shall have war, M. Fouquet."

"I believe, that if God has given a beak and talons to the eagle, it is that he should show his royalty."

The king reddened with pleasure.

"We have expended largely during the last few days, M. Fouquet. Will you not scold me?"

"Sire, your majesty has twenty years of youth before you, and a thousand millions to expend during those twenty years."

"A thousand millions is a large sum, M. Fouquet, is it not?"

"I will economize, sire; besides, your majesty, in M. Colbert and myself, has two valuable men. The one will make you spend your money—that is myself, in case your majesty should still deign to employ me: and the other will economize it—that will be M. Colbert."

"M. Colbert!" cried the king, astonished.

"Undoubtedly, M. Colbert is an excellent calculator."

On hearing this eulogium pronounced by an enemy, in favor of the enemy himself, the king felt full of confidence and admiration.

And there was not, in fact, in Fouquet's looks any thing which could detract a letter from the words he uttered; he was not speaking in praise in order to wind up with a reproach.

The king understood him, and grounded arms before so much generosity and nobleness of mind.

"You praise M. Colbert," said he.

"Yes, sire, I praise him; for besides being a man of merit, I believe him much devoted to your majesty's interests."

"Is it because he has often opposed your views?" said the king, smiling.

"Precisely so, sire."

"Explain that to me."

"It is very simple. I am the man who has to bring in money: he the man to prevent its going out again."

"Come, come, monsieur the superintendent, you will tell me something to correct this good opinion."

"Administratively, sire?"

"Yes."

"Not in the least, sire."

"Really?"

"Upon my honor, I know not in all France a better clerk than M. Colbert."

This word clerk had not in 1661 the same subalterne signification which it has in our days; but coming from the lips of M. Fouquet, whom the king had just before called monsieur the superintendent, it assumed a somewhat hum-

bling and minor character, which placed M. Fouquet in his right position, as it did Colbert.

"Well," said Louis XIV., "it is, however, Colbert, economical as he may be, who has regulated my fêtes at Fontainebleau; and I can assure you, Monsieur Fouquet, that he has not in any way prevented my money from going out."

Fouquet bowed, but without making any reply.

"Is not that your opinion?" inquired the king.

"I find, sire," replied he, "that M. Colbert has done every thing with infinite order, and is deserving, in that respect, of all the praises of your majesty."

This word *order* was a suitable companion to the word *clerk*.

No organization in the world was more sensitive, had more delicacy of tact, than that of Louis XIV.; he could perceive and seize the shadow of sensations before the sensations were themselves expressed.

The king understood then that the clerk had evinced too much order in Fouquet's opinion, that is to say, that the so splendid fêtes at Fontainebleau might have been still more splendid.

He consequently felt, that some one might speak in disparagement of his festivities; he felt somewhat of the mortification of the country beau, who adorned with the most splendid garments of his wardrobe arrives at Paris, where the man of real elegance either looks at him too pointedly or too little.

This portion of the conversation, so staid, and yet so exquisitely adroit on the part of Fouquet, gave the king a higher esteem for the character of the man and the capacity of the minister.

Fouquet took his leave at two in the morning, and the king threw himself upon his bed, rather uneasy, rather confused at the covert lesson he had just received, and nearly half an hour was employed by him in recalling to his mind, the embroideries, the tapestries, the bills of fare, the architecture of the triumphal arches, the arrangement of the illuminations and fireworks imagined by the orderly clerk Colbert.

The result of this meditation was that the king passing in review all that had taken place within the last eight days, found some blots in his great fêtes.

But Fouquet by his politeness, by his graceful manner, by his generosity had

struck a deeper blow at Colbert, than the latter by his craft, his malignity, his persevering hatred, had even struck at Fouquet.

CHAPTER XLIII.

FONTAINEBLEAU AT TWO IN THE MORNING.

As we have seen, Saint-Aignan, left the king's room at the moment when the superintendent was entering it.

Saint-Aignan was charged with an urgent mission; which is equivalent to saying that M. de Saint-Aignan was going to employ his time so as to execute it with the least possible delay.

The man whom we have introduced as the king's favorite was a man of rare qualities, one of those valuable courtiers whose vigilance and clearness of intention cast even in those days into the shade all past or future favorites, and balanced by his punctuality the servility of Dangeau.

Moreover, Dangeau was not the favorite, he was the creature of the king.

M. de Saint-Aignan immediately set about to form his plans.

He thought that the first indications he could receive would be best obtained from Guiche.

He therefore ran in search of Guiche.

Guiche whom we have seen disappear behind one of the wings of the palace, and who appeared to be retiring to his own rooms; Guiche had not returned to them.

Saint-Aignan was therefore obliged to search for him elsewhere.

After having turned and twisted in every direction, Saint-Aignan perceived something like a human form leaning against a tree.

This form had all the immobility of a statue, and appeared to be much occupied in observing a window the curtains of which window were hermetically closed.

As this window was that of Madame, Saint-Aignan thought that the form might be that of Guiche.

He therefore approached stealthily and soon found that he had not been mistaken.

Guiche had borne away from his conversation with Madame such a load of happiness that all his strength of soul was scarcely capable of supporting it.

On his side Saint-Aignan knew that Guiche had played some part in the

introduction of la Vallière into Madame's household; a courtier knows every thing and remembers every thing. Only, he had never known by what title and upon what conditions Guiche had thus accorded his patronage to la Vallière; but as by questioning much, it is rarely that a little cannot be picked up, Saint-Aignan calculated on learning more or less on questioning Guiche with all the delicacy, and at the same time with all the perseverance of which he was capable.

Saint-Aignan's plan was the following.

If the information he obtained was favorable, to tell the king enthusiastically that a priceless pearl had fallen into his hands and claim the privilege of setting that pearl in the royal crown.

If, on the contrary, the reports were unfavorable, which after all was possible, to discover the degree of interest the king felt towards la Vallière, and to regulate his communication in such a way as to have the young girl expelled, so as to make to himself a merit with all other women who might have any pretensions to the king's heart, by this very expulsion, beginning with Madame and ending with the queen.

In case the king should prove tenacious in his passion, to conceal the unfavorable reports, let la Vallière know that these unfavorable reports were locked up in a secret drawer, the memory of the confidant, thus display his generosity before the eyes of the unfortunate girl, and keep her constantly wavering between gratitude and fear, so as to secure her as a friend at court, and interested as an accomplice to make the fortune of her accomplice while insuring her own.

As to the day on which the bomb-shell of the past should burst, even supposing it should one day burst, Saint-Aignan promised himself to have duly taken every precaution and to pretend to the king that he was perfectly ignorant of all.

On that day also the part he would have to play towards la Vallière would be one of superb generosity.

It was with these ideas, which had budded in half an hour—warmed into life by ambitious cupidity—that Saint-Aignan, the best son in the world—as la Fontaine would have said—went on his way with the settled purpose of making Guiche speak out; that is to say, to disturb his happiness—a happiness, it

must be confessed, of which Saint-Aignan was ignorant.

It was one o'clock in the morning when Saint Aignan saw Guiche, standing motionless, leaning against the trunk of a tree, his eyes nailed to the luminous window.

One o'clock in the morning—that is to say the sweetest hour in the whole night—the one which painters crown with myrtle and budding poppies—the hour of languishing eyes, and palpitating hearts, and drooping heads—an hour which casts a look back on the past and addresses a loving salutation to the new-born day.

To Guiche it was the Aurora of ineffable happiness; he would have given a treasure to a mendicant standing in his path rather than he should interrupt him in his dreams.

It was precisely at that hour that the ill-advised Saint Aignan—egotism always counsels badly—stealing behind him, slapped him on the shoulder, at the moment Guiche was murmuring a word, or, rather, a name.

"Ah!" cried he loudly, "I was seeking for you."

"Who! me?" cried Guiche, with a start

"Yes! and I find you dreaming of the moon. Are you, perchance, attacked by poetic madness, my dear count, and are you making verses?"

The young count managed to force his features into a smile, while a thousand maledictions were rising against Saint Aignan from the bottom of his heart.

"Perhaps," said he, "but to what lucky accident—"

"Ah! that proves to me that you have not understood me—"

"How so?"

"Why, I began by telling you that I was seeking for you."

"You were seeking for me?"

"Yes, and I have caught you."

"At what, I pray you?"

"Why, making odes to Phyllis."

"That is true, and I do not deny it," replied Guiche, laughing; "yes, my dear count, I am making odes to Phyllis."

"It is your natural right."

"My right?"

"Undoubtedly—you who are the natural protector of every beautiful and intellectual woman."

"What the deuce do you mean by coming to me with such stories?"

"They are acknowledged truths, and that I know full well."

"But stay. I am in love."

"You?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, my dear count; come, now, and tell me all about it."

And Guiche fearing, somewhat late perhaps, that Saint Aignan might observe the window he had been gazing at, took him by the arm and endeavored to lead him away.

"Oh!" said the latter, resisting him, "do not take me towards those dark woods, it is too damp down there. Let us remain in the moonlight, will you?"

And while yielding to the pressure of Guiche's arm, he remained in the garden near the palace.

"Well!" said Guiche, resigned to his fate, "conduct me where you will, and ask me any thing you please."

"It is impossible to be more obliging."

Then after a moment's silence—

"My dear count," continued Saint Aignan, "I wish you to say a few words with regard to a certain person whom you have patronized."

"And whom you love?"

"I say neither no nor yes, my dear count. You will readily understand that a man does not thus give away his heart, purchase a life annuity, without inquiring as to the security of the party."

"You are right," said Guiche, sighing, "a heart is a precious thing."

"And mine, above all, for it is tender, and this I can assure you."

"Oh! you are well known count; go on."

"Well, I will out with it at once. The matter in question regards Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente."

"Why, my dear Saint Aignan, you are running mad, I presume."

"And why so?"

"I never patronized Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente."

"You don't say so?"

"Never."

"It was not you that placed Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente with Madame?"

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, and this you ought to know better than any one, my dear count, is of sufficiently good family not to require any one's patronage."

"You are bantering me."

"No, upon my honor, I cannot comprehend your meaning."

"Then you had absolutely nothing to do with her admission into Madame's household?"

"Nothing whatever."

"You did not know her?"

"I saw her for the first time on the day she was presented to Madame. Therefore, as I have not patronized her, as I did not know her, I cannot furnish you, my dear count, with the information you desire."

And Guiche made a movement to leave his questioner.

"Gently! gently! a moment, my dear count; you cannot escape me thus."

"Your pardon, but I thought it almost time to be retiring home."

"You were not retiring, however, when I—I cannot say met you, but found you."

"But, my dear count, if you have any thing more to say to me I am entirely at your disposal."

"And you are right, by heaven! half an hour more or less can make no difference. Your laces will not be either more or less rumpled. Swear to me that you have no unpleasant information to give to me with regard to her, and that it is not because you feared to hurt my feelings that you have remained silent."

"Oh! the dear child, I believe her to be pure as crystal."

"You overwhelm me with joy. I will not, however, have the appearance in your eyes of being so ill informed as I seem to be. It is certain that you provided the household of the princess with maids of honor. There was even a song made upon the subject of this supply."

"You know, my friend, that they write songs now upon every subject."

"You know the song, I suppose?"

"No; but sing it to me, and I shall make its acquaintance."

"I cannot tell you how it begins, but I know the end of it."

"Good! that in itself is something."

Guiche, of love the firm ally,
The maids of honor did supply.

"The idea is weak and the rhyme poor."

"What can you expect, my dear count; it was not written either by Racine or Molière, but by la Feuillade,

and a great lord cannot rhyme like one of those scribbling fellows."

"It is really a pity that you can only remember the end."

"Stay! stay a moment—I have just caught the beginning of the second verse."

"I am all attention."

He has caged a pretty pair,
Montalais and——

"La Valière of course," said Guiche.

"Yes, that's it—la Vallière—you have discovered the rhyme, my dear count."

"A wonderful discovery, truly!"

"Montalais and la Vallière! that's it, exactly. It was then these two little girls that you have patronized."

And Saint Aignan laughed.

"Then you do not find Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente in your song?" said Guiche.

"No, indeed."

"Then you are satisfied?"

"Undoubtedly; but I find Montalais," rejoined Saint Aignan, "still laughing."

"Oh! you will find her every where; she is a very active young lady."

"You know her?"

"Through another. She was patronized by a certain Malicorne, who is patronized by Manicamp. Manicamp begged me to obtain the place of maid of honor for Montalais in Madame's household, and that of officer for Malicorne in the household of Monsieur. I applied for them; you know that I have a great liking for that fellow, Manicamp."

"And you obtained both places."

"Yes, for Montalais; but for Malicorne yes, and no; he is only tolerated as yet. Is that all you wished to know?"

"There is still the rhyme."

"What rhyme?"

"The rhyme which you discovered."

"La Vallière."

"Yes."

And Saint Aignan again resumed his laughing fit, which was so grating to de Guiche's ears.

"Well! it is true! that I procured her admission into Madame's suite."

"Ah! ah! ah!" cried Saint Aignan.

"But," continued Guiche, with repelling coldness, "you will greatly oblige me, count, by not jesting with that name—Mademoiselle la Baume

le Blanc de la Vallière, is a person of unimpeachable virtue."

"Unimpeachable virtue?"

"Yes."

"You have not then heard the new rumor?" cried Saint-Aignan.

"No, and you will even do me a service, my dear count, by keeping this rumor for yourself and for those who are spreading it."

"Why, really, do you take this matter so seriously?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is beloved by one of my best friends."

Saint-Aignan started.

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, count," continued Guiche, "and consequently you will understand, you, the most polite man in all France, that I cannot allow any thing like ridicule to be addressed to my friend."

"Oh! marvellously well!"

And Saint-Aignan bit his fingers, partly from vexation and partly from disappointed curiosity.

Guiche made him a very courteous bow.

"You drive me from you?" said Saint-Aignan who was dying with desire to ascertain the name of this friend.

"I do not drive you away, my very dear friend, I am finishing my verses to Phyllis."

"And these verses."

"Are a quatrain. You comprehend do you not, that a quatrain is sacred?"

"Oh! yes, assuredly."

"And as out of four verses, of which it must naturally be composed, I have still three verses and a hemistich to make, I have need of all my brains."

"That can readily be imagined. Farewell, count."

"Farewell."

"By-the-by—"

"What?"

"Have you much facility for composition?"

"An enormous stock."

"Will you have finished your three verses and a half by to-morrow morning?"

"I hope so."

"Well then, I will see you to-morrow."

"To-morrow be it. A lieu!"

Saint-Aignan was therefore com-

pelled to take leave; he did so, and disappeared behind a row of horn beams.

The conversation had led Guiche and Saint-Aignan to some distance from the palace. Every mathematician, every poet, every dreamer has his absent fits. Saint-Aignan found himself therefore when he left Guiche at the extremity of the wall, and near the servants' offices, where, behind great clumps of acacias and chestnut trees, crossing their branches festooned with clematis and wild vines, the wall of separation rises between the wood and the court-yard of the offices.

Saint-Aignan when alone walked towards these buildings; Guiche took an opposite direction. The one was returning toward the gardens while the other went toward the walls.

Saint-Aignan was walking under an impenetrable arch of cork trees, lilacs and gigantic hawthorns, treading upon fine sand, concealed by the darkness, all sound deadened by the mossy borders.

He was ruminating a revenge, which would be difficult of execution, and altogether unshod, as Tallemant de Riaux would have said, at not having been able to learn more with regard to la Vallière, notwithstanding the ingenious windings he had adopted in order to approach the subject.

Suddenly, the murmur of human voices struck his ear. It was a sort of whispering, female complainings mingled with reiterated supplications; every now and then a slight laugh, sighs, stifled cries of surprise; but a female voice was the most audible of the whole.

Saint-Aignan paused to ascertain whence these noises could proceed; he found to his great surprise that the voices came not from the earth but from the summits of the trees.

He raised his head and gliding from beneath his covered walk, he perceived looking over the top of the wall, a woman roosted upon a ladder, in grand communication, by words and gestures with a man perched on a tree, his head being alone visible, his body being altogether concealed by the thick foliage and shade of a chestnut tree.

The woman was on the inside of the wall; the man on the outer side.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE LABYRINTH.

SAINT AIGNAN was only in search of information, and had stumbled on an adventure. This was being lucky.

Curious to know why, and above all, on what subject, this man and woman were conversing at such an hour and in so singular a position, Saint Aignan made himself as small as possible, and crept almost beneath the rounds of the ladder.

Then, taking measures to make himself as comfortable as possible, he leaned against a tree and listened.

He heard the following dialogue:

It was the woman who was speaking.

"In truth, Monsieur Manicamp," said she, in a voice which, in the midst of the reproaches she articulated, retained a singularly coquettish accent—"in truth, your indiscretion is most dangerous. We cannot converse long in this way without being discovered."

"That is very probable," observed the man, in a most calm and phlegmatic tone.

"Well, then, and what would be said of us? Oh! I declare to you, should any one see me, I should die of shame."

"Oh! that would be mere childishness, and of which I believe you altogether incapable."

"It would not matter so much if there were really any thing between us; but gratuitously to injure my reputation would indeed be very foolish. Good-by, Monsieur Manicamp!"

"Good, I know the man; and now I shall see the woman," said Saint Aignan, watching the rounds of the ladder, on which were perceptible two very pretty feet, elegantly encased in blue satin shoes and flesh-colored silk stockings.

"Oh! come, come, for mercy's sake, my dear Montalais," exclaimed Manicamp, "do not leave me. What the deuce! I have still things of the greatest importance to tell you."

"Montalais," thought Saint Aignan, "that makes three. The three gossips have each their adventure, only I thought that Montalais' adventurer was called Malicorne and not Manicamp."

At this appeal from her interlocutor, Montalais paused in her descent.

The unfortunate Manicamp was then seen climbing a story higher in his

chestnut tree, whether it was to get nearer to the top of the wall or to relieve the awkwardness of his position.

"Come now," said he, "listen to me; you well know, I trust, that I have no evil intention."

"Undoubtedly. But why should you have written that letter to stimulate my gratitude? Why this rendezvous, which you requested of me, at such an hour and in such a place as this?"

"I stimulated your gratitude by reminding you that it was I who had obtained your appointment with Madame, because, as I eagerly desired this rendezvous, and which you have had the goodness to grant to me, I employed the means I thought most certain to obtain it. I asked it at this hour and in this place, because the hour appeared a discreet one, and the place solitary. For I had to question you on matters that demand discretion and solitude."

"M. Manicamp!"

"Nothing that is not fitting and honorable, dear young lady."

"Monsieur Manicamp I think it would be more fitting that I should retire."

"Listen to me, or I will jump out of my nest here into yours; and beware of defying me, for there is precisely at this moment a branch which is incommoding me, and which provokes me to an excess. Do not imitate this branch, but listen to me."

"I will consent to listen to you, but you must be brief; for if you have a branch that provokes you, I on my part have a ladder, the rounds of which ought to be called triangular, for one of them hurts my feet terribly. I warn you that my shoes are already cut through."

"Do me the favor to give me your hand, mademoiselle."

"And for what?"

"Never mind, give it to me."

"There is my hand—but what are you doing now?"

"I am drawing you towards me."

"But with what object? You do not want me to perch myself up there with you, in your tree, I hope."

"No, but I wish that you should sit upon the wall; there, that is well! the top of the wall is broad and smooth, and I would give much that you would allow me to seat myself beside you."

"Oh! no; you are very well where you are: we should be seen."

"Do you believe that?" asked Manicamp, in an insinuating tone.

"I am sure of it."

"Be it so. I will remain in my chestnut tree, although it is dreadfully uncomfortable."

"Monsieur Manicamp! Monsieur Manicamp! we are not coming to the joint."

"That is true."

"You have written to me."

"That is true also."

"But why did you write to me?"

"Figure to yourself that Guiche set off to-day at two o'clock."

"And what then?"

"Seeing that he had gone I set off after him, as I do usually."

"That I see clearly; since here you are."

"Wait a moment. You know, do you not, that poor Guiche was in disgrace to the very neck."

"Alas! yes."

"It therefore was the height of imprudence in him to come here to meet those who had exiled him at Paris, and above all those whom they wished to separate him from."

"You reason as soundly as old Pythagoras, Monsieur Manicamp."

"Guiche is as obstinate as a lover; he would not listen to my remonstrances. I prayed, I supplicated, he would not hear a word. Ah! the deuse!"

"What is the matter?"

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, but this confounded branch, which I have already had the honor to mention to you, has just torn my hose."

"It is dark," replied Montalais, laughing; "go on, Monsieur Manicamp."

"Guiche therefore as I said set off on horseback and at full gallop, and I followed him but at a foot pace. You will comprehend that for a man to throw himself into the water at the same moment and as quickly as a friend throws himself in, would be to prove himself a fool or a madman. I therefore allowed Guiche to take the lead, and came on with sage slowness, persuaded as I was, that the unfortunate man would not be received, or if he were so, would turn his horse's bridle at the first butt, and that I should see him returning more rapidly than he had set out, without my proceeding farther than Ris or Melun, and that was going too far, you will admit; eleven leagues distance and as many to return.

Montalais shrugged her shoulders.

"Laugh as much as you please,

mademoiselle, but if instead of being squarely seated there on the flat top of a wall as you are, you were on horseback on the branch which I am now bestriding you would like the emperor Augustus aspire to descend."

"A little patience, my dear M. Manicamp; a few moments are soon passed. You were saying then that you had got beyond Ris and Melun?"

"Yes. I had passed Ris and Melun, I continued riding on, more and more astonished at not seeing him return; in fine, here I am at Fontainebleau, I question, I inquire in every direction after Guiche, no one has spoken to, no one has seen him in the town; he arrived at full gallop, entered the palace and has disappeared. Since eight o'clock have I been in Fontainebleau demanding Guiche of every echo, but no Guiche. I am dying with anxiety; you will readily comprehend that I did not go and throw myself into the lion's mouth by entering the palace, as my imprudent friend has done. I came at once to the offices and sent a letter to you; now mademoiselle, in the name of heaven! tranquilize my fears?"

"That will not be a difficult task, my dear M. Manicamp; your friend Guiche has been admirably received."

"Really!"

"The king has treated him kindly."

"The king! who had exiled him?"

"Madame has smiled upon him; Monsieur appears to like him more than ever."

"Ah! ah!" cried Manicamp, "that explains to me how and why he remained. And has he not spoken of me?"

"Not a single word."

"That is not kind. What is he doing at this moment?"

"In all probability he is sleeping, and if not sleeping, dreaming."

"And what have they been doing all the evening?"

"Dancing."

"The famous ballet? And how was Guiche?"

"Superb."

"The dear friend! But now pardon me, mademoiselle, for I must move from my house into yours."

"What mean you?"

"You will comprehend that I cannot well expect that they will open the palace gates for me at this hour, and as to sleeping upon this branch I would willingly do so, but I declare the thing impossible to any other animal than a poll-parrot."

"But, Monsieur Manicamp, I cannot introduce a man over the wall."

"Two, mademoiselle," said a second voice, but with so timid an accent that it could be easily understood that the proprietor of this voice was duly impressed with the indecorum of such a request.

"Good heaven!" exclaimed Montalais, endeavoring to peer through the darkness to ascertain who it was at the foot of the chestnut tree, "who speaks to me?"

"'Tis I, mademoiselle."

"And who are you?"

"Malicorne, your very humble servant."

And Malicorne while saying these words raised himself with the aid of the lower branches to a level with the top of the wall.

"Monsieur Malicorne! good heaven! why you are both mad."

"I hope you are quite well, mademoiselle," said Malicorne with numerous civilities.

"This alone was wanting!" cried Montalais in despair.

"Oh! mademoiselle," murmured Malicorne, "do not be so harsh with me, I entreat you."

"But, mademoiselle," said Manicamp, "we are your friends, and no one can desire the death of their friends. Now to leave us to pass the night where we are is to condemn us to death."

"Oh!" cried Montalais, "M. Malicorne is stout and strong, and it will not kill him to pass a night under this starry canopy."

"Mademoiselle!"

"It will be a just punishment for this wild prank."

"Be it so; let Malicorne arrange matters with you, as he can, for my part I come over," said Manicamp.

And bending the unfortunate branch against which he had so bitterly complained, he contrived with the aid of both his hands and feet to reach the wall, and sit down beside Montalais.

Montalais endeavored to push him away, Manicamp resolutely maintained his position.

This conflict which lasted a few seconds had its picturesque advantages, advantages which the eyes of Saint-Aignan did not certainly neglect.

But Manicamp conquered. Being master of the ladder he placed his foot upon it and gallantly offered his hand to his enemy.

During this time Malicorne installed

himself in the same place on the chestnut tree which Manicamp had occupied, promising himself that he would soon succeed him in the one he had taken possession of.

Manicamp and Montalais descended some of the rounds of the ladder, Manicamp insisting and Montalais laughing and defending herself.

The voice of Malicorne was then heard entreating.

"Oh! mademoiselle!" cried Malicorne, "I entreat you not to abandon me: I am in a dangerous position, and cannot without the risk of serious accident manage alone to get on to the wall. That Manicamp should tear his clothes is all well and good, he has those of M. de Guiche, but as to me, I shall not have even those of Manicamp to fall back upon since they are torn."

"I opine," said Manicamp without paying the slightest attention to the lamentation of Malicorne, "I opine that the best course to be adopted is that I should go instantly in search of Guiche. Later, I should not perhaps be able to get into his rooms."

"It is my advice, also," replied Montalais, "go then, M. Manicamp."

"A thousand thanks, farewell, mademoiselle," said Manicamp, jumping to the ground, "it is impossible to be more amiable than you are."

"Your servant, M. de Manicamp; I must now get rid of Malicorne."

Malicorne sighed profoundly.

"Go! go!" continued Montalais.

Manicamp went a few paces, then returning to the foot of the ladder.

"By-the-by, mademoiselle," said he, "which is the way to M. de Guiche's apartments?"

"Ah! that is true; nothing can be plainer, you must follow the covered walk."

"Oh! very well."

"You will arrive at the green opening."

"Good."

"There you will see four avenues."

"Exactly."

"You will go down one of them."

"But which?"

"The one to the right."

"The one to the right?"

"No; the one on the left."

"Ah! the deuce."

"No; no—stop a moment—"

"You do not appear very serious recall your memory."

"The middle one."

"But there are four."

"That is true. All that I know is that out of the four there is one that leads straight to Madame's rooms; that one I know full well."

"But M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments."

"No; thank heaven!"

"The one then that leads there would be useless to me, and I should like to barter it for the one that leads to Guiche's rooms."

"Yes, certainly; I know that one also, but as to describing it from this spot, it would be impossible."

"But in fine, mademoiselle, supposing that I can make out this thrice happy avenue."

"Oh! then you are close by."

"Very well."

"You will then only have to cross the labyrinth."

"Ah! only that—the deuse! there is a labyrinth then?"

"Yes, and rather intricate; even in the day time, one sometimes goes wrong; there are endless turnings and twistings; you must first of all turn three times to the right, then twice to the left, then there is a turn—but stay! is it one turn or two turns? In fine, when you have got out of the labyrinth you will find an avenue of sycamores, and this avenue leads you straight to the pavilion where M. de Guiche lodges."

"Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, "your directions are most admirable, and I doubt not that by following them, I shall at once inevitably lose myself. I have therefore a trifling service to request of you—"

"And what is that?"

"It is to offer me your arm, and guide me like another—like another—what is it? I was however well versed in mythology, mademoiselle, but the serious nature of these events has driven it entirely from my mind; come then, I beg of you."

"And I," cried Malicorne in a piteous tone, "am I to be thus abandoned?"

"Ah! Monsieur," said Montalais to Manicamp, "what you ask is impossible. I might be seen with you and at such an hour, only think what might be said."

"You will have your conscience to defend you," replied Manicamp sentimentally.

"Impossible! sir, impossible!"

"Then let me assist Malicorne to

descend; he is a very intelligent lad, and has an admirable scent; he will guide me; and should we lose ourselves, we shall at all events be two, and we should save each other. Should we be met, being two, we shall have the appearance of being something; while, on the contrary, were I alone, I might be taken for either a lover or a thief. Come Malicorne, here is the ladder."

"Monsieur Malicorne," cried Montalais, "I forbid you to leave your tree, and that under the penalty of incurring all my anger."

Malicorne had already stretched one leg towards the top of the wall, and sorrowfully withdrew it.

"Hush!" said Manicamp, in a whisper.

"What is the matter?" said Montalais.

"I hear footsteps."

"Oh! good Heaven!"

And indeed the noise of steps heard by Manicamp soon became distinct; there was then a rustling of leaves, and Saint Aignan made his appearance, with laughing eyes and outstretched hands, surprising them in the position in which they stood; that is to say, Malicorne upon the tree, with outstretched neck—Montalais on her ladder, and clinging to it—Manicamp upon the ground, with one foot advanced, ready to take a start.

"Good evening to you, Manicamp," said the count; "you are most welcome, my dear friend; we missed you this afternoon, and you have been inquired for. Mademoiselle de Montalais, I am your most humble servant."

Montalais blushed.

"Ah! good Lord!" stammered she, hiding her face with both hands.

"Mademoiselle," said Saint Aignan, "tranquillize yourself; I know your innocence, and shall report it favorably. Manicamp, follow me; covered walks, cross-ways and labyrinths are all well known to me; I will be your Ariadne, hey! that is the mythological name that so much puzzled you, is it not?"

"It is so really. I thank you, count."

"And at the same time, count, be pleased to take M. Malicorne with you," said Montalais.

"By no means! by no means!" exclaimed Malicorne. "M. Manicamp has talked with you as long as it suited him: it is now my turn, mademoiselle, if you please. I have, on my side, a

multitude of things to say to you regarding our future prospects."

"You hear that," said the count, laughing: "remain with him, mademoiselle; do you not know that this is the night of secrets?"

And taking Manicamp's arm, the count led him away rapidly in the direction of the paths which Montalais so well knew, but indicated so erroneously.

Montalais followed them with her eyes as long as she could distinguish them.

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW MALICORNE HAD BEEN DISLODGED FROM THE SIGN OF THE PEACOCK.

WHILE Montalais was following the count and Manicamp with her eyes, Malicorne had taken advantage of this preoccupation of the young lady, to take up a less painful position. On turning round, this change which had taken place in Malicorne's position immediately struck Montalais.

Malicorne was sitting like a monkey on the wall, his feet resting on the first round of the ladder.

The leaves of the wild vine and of the honeysuckle formed, as it were, a garland round his head, such as fauns are represented with, while the trunks of these creeping plants, against which the ladder was placed, resembled cloven feet.

As to Montalais, nothing in her was wanting to make her appear a perfect dryad.

"Tell me," said she, "do you make me sufficiently unhappy? do you persecute me, tyrant that you are?"

"What! I a tyrant!"

"Yes; you are incessantly exposing me to remark, M. Malicorne—you are a monster of wickedness."

"Who, me?"

"What business have you at Fontainebleau, tell me now? Is not your domicile at Orleans?"

"What I have to do here, do you ask? Why I have to see you."

"Oh! a fine necessity, truly."

"Not for you, perhaps, mademoiselle, but very certainly so for me. As to my domicile, you well know I have abandoned it, and that for the future I have no other domicile than there where you inhabit. Therefore, your

domicile being now at Fontainebleau, to Fontainebleau I have come."

Montalais shrugged up her shoulders.

"You wished to see me, did you not?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well you have seen me; you are satisfied: away with you."

"Oh! no," cried Malicorne.

"What mean you by oh! no?"

"I did not come only to see you; I came to converse with you."

"Well then we will converse hereafter, and in another place."

"Hereafter; God knows whether I shall meet you again in another place. We shall never find a more favorable one than this."

"But I cannot to-night; I cannot at this moment."

"And why not?"

"Because a thousand things have happened this very night."

"Then my coming will make a thousand and one."

"No, no; Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente is waiting for me in my room with a communication of the highest importance."

"Has she been waiting long?"

"For at least an hour."

"Then," coolly said Malicorne, "she will wait a few minutes longer."

"M. Malicorne," said Montalais, "you forget yourself."

"That is to say that you forget me, mademoiselle; and that I am losing patience at the part you are making me play here. By heaven! for the last eight days I have been prowling all around you, without your having once deigned to perceive that I was there."

"You have been prowling about here for the last eight days?"

"Like a wandering wolf; burned here by the fire-works, which have singed two of my wigs; half drowned there by the dampness of the willows, or the spray from the water-works, always half-starved, always tired to death, with the perspective of a wall, or the necessity of an escalade. By Jupiter! this is not a life to lead, excepting one were a salamander, a squirrel or an otter. But since you carry your inhumanity so far as to wish me to deny my position as a man, I now proclaim it. A man I am, by Jove! and a man I will remain, unless I receive counter-orders."

"Well, then, what is it that you

wish—what do you require—what is it you exact?" submissively inquired Montalais.

"Do you mean to tell me that you were ignorant of my being at Fontainebleau?"

"I—"

"Be frank now."

"I suspected it."

"Well, then, could you not have managed to see me at least once a day during this last week?"

"I have always been prevented, M. Malicorne."

"Pshaw!"

"Only ask our young ladies, if you do not believe me."

"I never ask for explanations with regard to matters that I know better than any one."

"Be more calm, M. Malicorne, this will soon change."

"And it must do so."

"You know whether one sees you or does not see you; you know whether one thinks of you?" said Montalais, in her most coaxing tone.

"Oh! I am thought of then?"

"Upon my word."

"And there is nothing new?"

"In what respect?"

"As to my office in Monsieur's household."

"Ah! my dear M. Malicorne, it was impossible to approach his royal highness during the last few days."

"And now?"

"Now it is quite another affair; since yesterday he is no longer jealous."

"Really! and how did his jealousy leave him?"

"There has been a diversion."

"Tell me all about it."

"A rumor has been spread that the king had cast his eyes upon another woman, and Monsieur became calm at once."

"And who was it that spread this rumor?"

Montalais lowered her voice.

"Between ourselves," said she, "I believe that Madame and the king understand each other."

"Ah! ah!" cried Malicorne, "that was indeed the best plan they could adopt. But M. de Guiche, the poor sighing swain?"

"Oh! he is altogether put aside."

"Have they written to each other?"

"Oh! no; I have not seen either of them use a pen for the last week."

"How are you with Madame?"

"On the best terms."

"And with the king?"

"The king smiles at me when he passes by."

"Tis well! but now tell me upon what woman have they cast their eyes to serve them as a screen."

"On la Vallière."

"Oh! oh! poor girl; but we ought to prevent this, my dear."

"And why?"

"Because M. Raoul de Bragelonne would kill her if he should entertain any suspicion."

"Raoul! the good Raoul! do you believe that?"

"Women have the pretension to understand what is passion," said Malicorne, "and women cannot even read what is passing in their own hearts. Well! I now tell you that M. de Bragelonne loves la Vallière to such a degree that if she shows any intention to deceive him he will kill her or will kill himself."

"The king is there to defend her," observed Montalais.

"The king!" exclaimed Malicorne.

"Undoubtedly."

"And Raoul would kill the king as as freely as he would a fox!"

"Gracious heaven! But you have run mad, M. Malicorne!"

"By no means; on the contrary, all I have said to you, dearest, is serious, sound reason; and, for my part, I know one thing—"

"And what is that?"

"That I will very gently forewarn Raoul of this jest."

"Hush! you know not what you say," said Montalais, ascending another step of the ladder, to get nearer to Malicorne; "do not open your lips to our poor Bragelonne."

"And why not?"

"Because you know nothing yet."

"What then has happened?"

"Why, this evening—no one can be listening to us?"

"No one."

"Well, then, this evening, under the royal oak, la Vallière said aloud, and very ingenuously, 'I cannot conceive how any one, after having seen the king, can ever love another man.'"

Malicorne gave a violent start.

"Ah! good God!" exclaimed he, "she said that, the wretched girl?"

"Word for word."

"And does she think it?"

"La Vallière always thinks what she says."

"But that cries for vengeance! Why, women are all serpents!" cried Malicorne.

"Be calm, my dear Malicorne, be calm!"

"By no means; on the contrary, let us cut this evil at the root. Let us forewarn Raoul; it is time we did so."

"Simple man! on the contrary it is now too late," replied Montalais.

"And how so?"

"These words of la Vallière—"

"Well?"

"These words applied to the king—"

"Well?"

"Well, the king heard them."

"The king has heard of them! have they then been reported to the king?"

"The king heard them with his own ears."

"*Ohimé!*" as Cardinal Mazarin used to say.

"The king was concealed in the thicket nearest to the royal oak."

"And the result of all this!" inquired Malicorne, "that this plan of Madame and the king will proceed as upon wheels, only passing over the body of poor Bragelonne."

"You have said it."

"'Tis horrible!"

"But so it is."

"I faith," said Malicorne after a moment's silence spent in meditation, "between a great oak and a great king do not let us interpose our poor persons, we should be crushed, my dear one."

"That is what I meant to say to you."

"Let us think of ourselves."

"That is as I thought."

"Open then your lovely eyes—"

"And you, your great ears."

"Approach your little mouth for a good hearty kiss."

"Here it is," said Montalais, who paid him on the instant in ringing coin.

"Now then, let us see. There is M. de Guiche who loves Madame; there is la Vallière who loves the king, who loves Madame and la Vallière, there is Monsieur who loves no one but himself. Among all these love makings, a sim-pleton would make his fortune, what chance have we not then, who are people of good judgment."

"There! you are beginning with your dreams again."

"That is to say, with my realities. Allow yourself to be directed by me, dearest; up to the present time you have not had reason to complain, have you?"

"No."

"Well then, the past will answer for the future. Only as every one here is thinking for themselves, let us imitate them."

"That is but just."

"But we must think of ourselves only."

"Be it so!"

"Alliance, offensive and defensive!"

"I am ready to swear to it."

"Extend your hand? That is it: all for Malicorne!"

"All for Malicorne!"

"All for Montalais!" replied Malicorne in his turn extending his arm.

"And now what is to be done first?" inquired Montalais.

"Have our eyes incessantly open, our ears distended, pile up arms against all others, not leave any straggling about that may be used against ourselves."

"Agreed."

"Sealed."

"And sworn to."

"And now that the treaty is concluded. Adieu."

"How! adieu."

"Without doubt; you will return to your inn."

"To my inn!"

"Yes; do you not lodge at the Peacock?"

"Montalais! Montalais! you now give proof that you knew I was at Fontainebleau."

"And what does that prove, if not that one thinks of you more than you deserve—ingrate!"

"Hum!"

"Return then to the Peacock."

"Well—that is precisely—"

"What?"

"It has become impossible."

"Have you not a room?"

"I had one, but I have it no longer."

"You have it no longer! and who has taken it from you?"

"Stay a moment. Some little while ago I returned from running after you. I arrived at the hotel out of breath, when I perceived a litter upon which four countrymen were carrying a sick monk."

"A monk?"

"Yes, an old Franciscan with a gray beard; as I was looking at this monk they took him into the inn. As they were carrying him upstairs I followed him, and when I reached the landing I perceived that they were carrying him into my room."

"Into your room?"

"Yes, into my own room. Thinking it was a mistake I sent for the landlord; the landlord declared to me that the room that I had tenanted eight days was let to this Franciscan for the ninth."

"Oh! oh!"

"That is precisely what I said. I said even more, I wished to prove to him the indecorum of such a proceeding, but this monk, though dying as he appeared to be, raised himself upon his elbows, fixed on me two glaring eyes, and in a voice which would appropriately have commanded a charge of cavalry."

"'Thrust that fellow out of doors,' said he, which order was instantly executed by the landlord and the four bearers who compelled me to descend the staircase in quicker time than was absolutely decorous. And now you know, my dearest, how it happens that I have no lodging."

"But who can this Franciscan be? He must be a general."

"That is precisely the title I thought I heard one of the bearers address him by, when speaking to him in a half-whisper."

"So that—" said Montalais.

"So that I have no room, no inn, no lodging, and am as determined not to sleep in the open air as was my friend Manicamp just now."

"What's to be done?" said Montalais.

"That is the question," said Malicorne.

"Nothing can be more simple," said a third voice.

Montalais and Malicorne simultaneously uttered a shriek.

Saint Aignan appeared.

"Dear M. Malicorne," said Saint Aignan, "a lucky chance has brought me back again to relieve you from your difficulty. Come, I offer you a room in my apartments; and that one, I swear to you, no Franciscan shall deprive you of. As to you, my dear young lady, be in no way alarmed. I have already the secret of Mademoiselle de la Vallière and that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente. You have just had the goodness to confide yours to me. Thanks! I can keep three, as well as one alone."

Malicorne and Montalais looked at each other like two scholars playing truant; but as every thing considered, Malicorne saw a great advantage in the

proposal which had been made to him; he made a sign of resignation to Montalais, which the latter returned.

Then Malicorne descended the ladder step by step, reflecting at every round, how he could drag, piece by piece, the famous secret from M. de Saint Aignan.

Montalais had already flown away, light as a doe, and neither cross-path nor labyrinth could have misled her.

As to Saint Aignan he conducted Malicorne to his own rooms, showing him a thousand attentions, delighted at having thus at his call, the only two men, supposing that Guiche should still remain incommunicative, who could afford him all the information he required with regard to the maids of honor.

CHAPTER XLVI.

WHAT HAD REALLY HAPPENED AT THE PEACOCK INN.

LET us, in the first place, give to our readers some details with regard to the Peacock Inn, and we will afterwards pass on to a description of the travelers who inhabited it.

The Peacock Inn, as do all other inns, owed its name to the sign that hung before it.

This sign represented a peacock with its magnificent tail extended.

Only, in imitation of some of the old painters, who have given the face of a handsome youth to the serpent who tempted Eve, the painter of this sign had given the face of a woman to the peacock over the door.

This inn, a living epigram against that half of the human species which forms the charm of life, says M. Legouv  , was situated at Fontainebleau, in the first lateral street to the left, which, on coming from Paris, crosses the great artery that forms of itself the entire city of Fontainebleau.

This lateral street was in those days called the rue de Lyon, doubtless because it geographically led in the direction of the second capital of the kingdom.

This street consisted of two houses, inhabited by citizens; houses which were separated from each other by two large gardens surrounded by hedges.

But there appeared to be three houses in this street; and we must explain

low, notwithstanding this appearance, there were in reality but two.

The inn called the Beautiful Peacock had its principal front upon the high street, but turning on the rue de Lyon were two buildings, divided by court-yards, containing large apartments, fit for the reception of all descriptions of travellers, whether on foot or on horseback, or even in carriages; and not only furnished lodgings and table, but also convenient promenades and solitude to the richest of the courtiers, when, after some check received at court, they desired retirement, to commune with themselves, either to overcome their vexation or meditate revenge.

From the windows of this rear building travellers could look out, in the first place, on the street, with the grass growing between the paving stones, which it dislodged by degrees.

Then on the beautiful hedges of elder and hawthorn, which inclosed as between two beautiful green and flowery arms the citizens' houses, of which we have already spoken.

Then in the space between these houses, forming the background of the picture, and appearing like an impassable horizon, a line of high, thick, magnificent trees, the first sentinels of that vast forest which unrolls itself on the approach to Fontainebleau.

A person could, therefore, having an apartment on the corner of the great rue de Paris, enjoy the sight and noise of the passers by, and witness all the fêtes, while on that of the rue de Lyon, he could luxuriate in the view of and the tranquillity of the country.

Without taking into the account, that in urgent cases, he would have the advantage should he hear a knocking at the principal gate in the rue de Paris, of stealing out of the small door in the rue de Lyon, and running along the gardens of the citizen's houses, soon reach the thickets of the forest.

Malicorne, whom it will be remembered was the first to speak to us of this inn, called the Beautiful Peacock, while deploring his expulsion from it. Malicorne too much taken up with his own affairs, was far from having told Montalais all that might have been said with regard to this curious inn.

We will endeavor to make up for the unfortunate lapse of Malicorne.

Malicorne had, for instance, forgotten to describe the manner in which he

had entered the Beautiful Peacock inn.

Moreover, with the exception of the Franciscan monk of whom he said a word or two, he gave no description of the travellers who inhabited this inn.

The manner in which they had arrived at it; the manner in which they lived in it; the difficulty which there was for any other than privileged travellers to obtain admission into it without a sort of countersign, and to remain in it without certain preparatory precautions, ought however to have struck, and we will venture to assert even, did undoubtedly strike Malicorne.

But as we have before said, Malicorne had personal preoccupations which prevented his remarking many things.

In fact, all the apartments of the inn were occupied and retained by sedentary strangers of very calm demeanor, people of prepossessing countenances, none of whom were known to Malicorne.

All these travellers had arrived at the hotel since he had taken up his quarters there, every one of them had gained admittance by a sort of watchword which at first somewhat puzzled Malicorne, but having made some indirect inquiries, he had been informed, that the landlord gave as a reason for this species of precaution, that the town being full, as it then was, of rich lords, must also contain a number of skilful swindlers.

It was therefore necessary, for the reputation of a respectable house like the Beautiful Peacock, that travellers should not be allowed to be robbed there.

Therefore, Malicorne would sometimes ask himself, when in a reflective mood and thinking of his own position in the hostelry of the Beautiful Peacock, how he had been allowed to enter it, when, since his arrival there, he had seen the door closed against so many others.

He asked himself above all, how it was that Manicamp, who, in his opinion, was a nobleman, venerated by all the world, on wishing to give his horse a feed of corn at the Beautiful Peacock immediately on his arrival, had been repelled with a *nescio vas* of the rudest kind.

It was then a complete problem to Malicorne which, moreover, occupied as he was in amorous and ambitious intrigues, he had not applied himself to

solve; and had he attempted it, notwithstanding the intelligence that we have recognized in him, we would not venture to assert that he would have succeeded.

A few words will prove to the reader that it would have required *Œdipus* in person to resolve such an enigma.

During eight days seven travellers had entered the hotel, all of whom arrived the day after Malicorne had first cast his glance on the Beautiful Peacock.

These seven persons, each with a respectable suite, were

In the first place, a brigadier of the German army, with his secretary, his physician, three lackeys, and seven horses.

This brigadier was called the Count de Westput.

A Spanish cardinal, with two nephews, two secretaries, an officer of his mission, and twelve horses.

The name of this cardinal was Monseigneur Herredia.

A rich merchant from Bremen with his lackey and two horses.

This merchant was called Meinherr Bonstatt.

A Venetian senator, with his wife and daughter, both them of perfectly beautiful.

This senator was named Signor Marini.

A Scottish laird, with seven mountaineers of his own clan; all on foot.

The name of this laird was Mac-Cumnor.

An Austrian from Vienna, without either title or armorial bearings, who arrived in a carriage; he had much the appearance of a soldier, somewhat of the prelate.

He was called the counsellor.

And lastly, a Flemish lady, with a lackey, a waiting-maid, and a companion. Great luxury, great airs, great horses.

They called her the Flemish lady.

All these travellers, as we have said, arrived on the same day, and yet their arrival had occasioned no confusion in the hotel, no sort of stoppage in the street, their lodgings having been previously allotted to them at the request of their several couriers, who had reached Fontainebleau the night before or early the same day.

Malicorne, who had arrived one day before them on a meager horse loaded with a very meager valise, had announced himself at the hotel as the

friend of a lord anxious to see the fêtes, and that he, in his turn, would speedily arrive.

The landlord on hearing these words had smiled, as if well acquainted with either Malicorne or his lordly friend, and said to him,

"Choose, sir, the apartment which best suits you, since you have arrived the first."

And all this with that obsequiousness so significant with innkeepers, and which means to say "Make yourself easy, sir, we know with whom we have to deal, and you will be treated in conformity."

These words, and the gesture which accompanied them, had appeared kind, though by no means clear to Malicorne. But as he did not wish to be at great expense, and that by asking for a small room he might have been refused on account of its small importance, he hastened to avail himself of the words dropped by the innkeeper, and to dupe him at his own suggestion.

Therefore, smiling as if he were a man for whom the host was doing nothing more than he was entitled to,

"My dear host," said he, "I will take the best and the most airy of your apartments."

"With stabling?"

"With stabling."

"For what day?"

"Why, immediately, if it be possible."

"Oh! certainly."

"Only," hastened Malicorne to add, "I will not immediately occupy the great apartment."

"Good," said the host, giving a significant look.

"Certain reasons, which you will hereafter comprehend, oblige me only to take the small room on my own account."

"Yes, yes, yes," cried the host.

"My friend, when he comes, will take the large apartment, and naturally for the large apartment, he will settle directly with you."

"Very well," said the host, "very well—it was so agreed."

"It was so agreed."

"Word for word."

"That is extraordinary," muttered Malicorne, "therefore you understand."

"Yes."

"That is all that is requisite. Now that you understand, for you do understand me perfectly, do you not?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, then, you will show me to my room."

The host walked on, cap in hand before Malicorne.

Malicorne installed himself in his room, and remained there much surprised at seeing the host every time he came up stairs or went down again, giving him slight winks, indicating the best possible intelligence between two friends.

"There must be some mistake in all this," said Malicorne, to himself, "but while awaiting for it to be cleared up, I will profit by it, which is the best thing I can do."

And he rushed from his chamber with the velocity of a stag hound, and when upon the hunt after court news and his own belle, allowed himself to be half roasted here, half drowned there, as he had told Mademoiselle de Montalais.

The day following his installation he saw the seven travellers come in successively, and who, with their suites, nearly filled the whole hotel.

At sight of all these people, of all these equipages, of all these retinues, Malicorne rubbed his hands, congratulating himself on being so well housed, for, had he been but a day later, he would not have had a nest to creep into after returning from his explorations.

After all these foreigners had been located the host entered his room, and with his habitual graciousness said—

"My dear sir, the grand apartment beyond the second court-yard still remains at your service; you know that."

"Undoubtedly I know it."

"And it is a positive present that I make to you."

"Thanks."

"So that when your friend comes—"

"And what then?"

"Well, he will be perfectly satisfied with me; if he be not so he will be very difficult indeed."

"Your pardon; will you allow me to say a few words to you with regard to my friend?"

"Say on; gadzooks, you have a right to say what you please."

"He was to come as you know."

"And he is to come still."

"He may, however, have changed his mind."

"No."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am sure of it."

"I was going to say that should there be the least doubt of it—"

"Go on."

"Well, I must tell you that I will not answer for his coming."

"But he told you so, however."

"Certainly he told me so; but you know man proposes and God disposes, *verba volant, scripta manent*."

"Which means to say—"

"Words have wings, but that which is written remains; and as he has not written to me, as he merely said this to me, I will authorize you, then, without however, requesting you to do so, for you will comprehend that it is very embarrassing."

"And what would you authorize me to do?"

"Zounds! to let his apartment if you can get a good price for it."

"What, I?"

"Yes, you."

"Never, sir; never would I do such a thing. You say he has not written to you?"

"No."

"He has written to me."

"Ah!"

"Yes."

"And in what terms? Come, let us see whether his letter agrees with his verbal instructions."

"I can give you the words of it, or pretty nearly."

"To the proprietor of the Beautiful Peacock Hotel—"

"You will have been already informed of a rendezvous which has been agreed upon by several persons of importance at your hotel. I belong to the society which is to meet at Fontainebleau. You will therefore retain a small room for a friend of mine, who will arrive whether before I do or subsequently—"

"And you are this friend, are you not?" said the host interrupting his account of the letter and addressing Malicorne.

The latter modestly bowed.

The host resumed.

"And a large apartment for myself. The large apartment is my affair; but I should wish the room to be at a moderate price, this room being intended for a poor devil—"

"He still means you does he not?" asked the host.

"Oh! yes, undoubtedly," responded Malicorne.

"Then we understand each other. Your friend is to pay for his own apartment and you will settle the account for yours."

"May I be flayed alive," said Malicorne to himself, "if I comprehend a single syllable of all this."

Then continuing a'oud,

"And tell me, did the name satisfy you?"

"What name?"

"Why the name at the bottom of the letter—I suppose you consider that sufficient guarantee?"

"I was about to ask you that," said the host.

"How! the letter was not signed?"

"No!" said the host, winking his eyes, in a mysterious and curious manner.

"Then," continued Malicorne imitating all these mysterious gestures, "if he did not think proper to give his name—"

"Well?"

"You must understand that he must have his reasons for withholding it—"

"Doubtless."

"And therefore you cannot expect that I, his friend, I, his confidant, would betray his incognito."

"You are perfectly right sir," replied the host, "neither do I insist upon it."

"I appreciate this delicacy. As to myself, as my friend has told you, my room is a separate account. Let us therefore make our arrangement."

"Sir, the arrangement is already made."

"You will remember the old saying, short reckonings make long friends. Therefore let us settle."

"Oh! there is no hurry."

"Never mind, let us settle at once, room and board for me, stabling and feed of my horse; how much will you charge per day?"

"Four livres, sir."

"That makes twelve livres for the three days I have spent here."

"Yes, sir, twelve livres."

"Here they are."

"But why, sir, do you wish to pay it immediately?"

"Because," said Malicorne, lowering his voice and again putting on his mysterious looks, as he had found that mystery had been so successful, "because if one were obliged to set off suddenly, to decamp from one moment to another, our accounts would be settled."

"Sir, you are perfectly right."

"Well then, I am at home here?"

"Assuredly."

"Well that is all right—Adieu!"

The landlord withdrew.

When Malicorne was alone, he reasoned in the following manner:

"There could only be M. de Guiche or Manicamp who could have written to the landlord in this way. M. de Guiche because he wished to secure a lodging for himself away from the court, whether successful or unsuccessful. Manicamp, because he may have been charged with this commission by M. de Guiche. This then would be what M. de Guiche or Manicamp must have imagined. The great apartment to receive in a decorous manner some great lady thickly veiled, with the provision for the said lady of a back door by which she may make her exit, and opening towards the forest in a by-way. A room to shelter, momentarily, should it be necessary, either Manicamp, M. de Guiche's confidant, a vigilant guardian of the door, or M. de Guiche himself, playing as the case might require, and for greater security, the part of confidant and master too."

"But this meeting which was to take place, and which has actually taken place in the hotel.

"They are undoubtedly people who are to be presented to the king; but the poor devil to whom this room was appropriated.

"A contrivance the better to conceal Guiche or Manicamp.

"If it be so, and it is very probable, there will not be much harm, and from Manicamp to M. de Guiche there is but a span, and from Manicamp to Malicorne there is but the purse."

After this reasoning Malicorne slept tranquilly leaving the seven foreigners to occupy and perambulate in every direction the seven apartments in the hotel of the Beautiful Peacock.

When he was not uneasy with regard to any thing at court; when he was tired after his excursions and his inquiries; tired of writing notes which he could never find an opportunity of delivering, he would return to his thrice happy little room, and with his elbows leaning on the balcony, bedecked with nasturtiums and creeping plants, he meditated on these foreign travellers, for whom Fontainebleau appeared to have no illuminations, no joy, no festivities.

It went on in this way until the seventh day—a day, the events of which we have detailed at great length in the preceding chapter.

On that day Malicorne was enjoying

the fresh air at his window, when Manicamp appeared on horseback.

"Good!" exclaimed Malicorne, recognizing him at first sight, "there is my man, who is coming to claim his apartment; that is to say, my room."

And he called Manicamp.

Manicamp raised his head, and in his turn recognized Malicorne.

"Ah! by Heaven!" cried the former, "I am glad to see you, Malicorne. I have been wandering all round Fontainebleau in search of three things, which I cannot find: Guiche, a room, and a stable."

"As to M. de Guiche I cannot give you either good or bad news, for I have not seen him; but as to your room and a stable that is another affair."

"Ah!"

"Yes; it is here that they have been retained for you."

"Retained, and by whom?"

"By you, as it appears to me."

"By me?"

"Have you not engaged a lodging?"

"By no means."

The host at this moment appeared upon the threshold of the door.

"A room!" said Manicamp.

"Have you retained it, sir?"

"No."

"Then there is no room."

"If this be the case, I have engaged a room," said Manicamp.

"A room, or an apartment?"

"Any thing you please."

"By letter?" asked the innkeeper.

Malicorne gave an affirmative nod of the head to prompt Manicamp.

"Why, by letter undoubtedly," said Manicamp; "have you not received a letter from me?"

"Under what date?" asked the host, for Manicamp's hesitation excited his suspicion.

Manicamp scratched his ear and looked up at Malicorne's window; but Malicorne had left his window to go down to his friend's assistance.

Just at this moment a traveller, muffled up in a long Spanish cloak, appeared under the porch, and near enough to hear the conversation.

"I ask you what is the date of the letter which you addressed to me desiring me to retain rooms for you?" repeated the host earnestly.

"It was on Wednesday last," said the mysterious stranger in a soft and mysterious voice, at the same time touching the host's shoulder.

Manicamp drew back; and Mali-

corne, who had just reached the door, in his turn, scratched his ear.

The host saluted the new comer as a man who recognized the real traveller.

"Sir," said he civilly, "your apartment awaits you as well as your stables. Only—"

He looked around him.

"Your horses?" he inquired.

"My horses will arrive, or they will not arrive. That matters not to you, does it, provided you are paid for what has been engaged?"

The innkeeper bowed still lower.

"Have you besides kept me the small room which I requested of you?"

"The deuse!" cried Malicorne, attempting to keep out of sight.

"That gentleman, your friend, has occupied it for the last week," said the host, pointing to Malicorne, who made himself as small as possible.

The traveller threw his cloak over his shoulder, keeping it to the height of his nose.

"That gentleman is not my friend," said he.

The host started back.

"I do not know that gentleman," continued the traveller.

"How!" cried the innkeeper, addressing Malicorne; "how! you are not this gentleman's friend?"

"What does that matter, provided you are paid?" majestically said Malicorne, parodying the stranger.

"It matters so much, sir," said the host, who began to perceive there had been a substitution of persons, "that I request you will immediately vacate the room which had been pre-engaged, and not by you."

"But," said Malicorne, "this gentleman cannot require, at one and the same time, a room on the first floor and an apartment on the second—if this gentleman take the room, I will take the apartment; if he chooses to take the apartment, I will keep the room."

"I am really very sorry, sir," said the traveller, in his soft tone, "but I require both the apartment and the room."

"But, in short, for whom?" asked Malicorne."

"The apartment, for myself—"

"Be it so; but the room?"

"Look there!" said the traveller, pointing to a sort of procession which was advancing.

Malicorne followed, with his eyes, the direction pointed out by the stranger's arm, and saw arrive upon a litter,

the Franciscan monk, of whom, with some details added by himself, he had spoken to Montalais.

The result of the arrival of the unknown traveller, and of the sick Franciscan, was the expulsion of Malicorne, which was enforced without any consideration for his comfort by the inn-keeper and the peasants, who served as bearers to the Franciscan monk.

The reader has been informed of the consequences of this expulsion, of the conversation between Manicamp and Montalais, whom Manicamp, more adroit than Malicorne, had managed to find, in order to obtain intelligence of Guiche; of the subsequent conversation between Montalais and Malicorne, and lastly of the double billet given by Saint Aignan to Manicamp and Malicorne for their night's lodging.

It now remains to inform our readers who was the traveller in the Spanish cloak, the principal tenant of the double apartment, and who was the Franciscan, quite as mysterious, whose arrival, together with that of the traveller in the cloak, had so unfortunately disarranged the combinations of the two friends.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A JESUIT OF THE ELEVENTH YEAR.

In order not to keep the reader in suspense, we will, in the first place, reply to the first question.

The traveller with the Spanish cloak thrown over his face was Aramis, who, after having left Fouquet, and having changed his episcopal costume for that of a complete cavalier, had left the palace and had repaired to the Beautiful Peacock, where, by a letter written several days previously, he had, as the host had truly said, ordered a room and an apartment to be retained for him.

Aramis, immediately after the expulsion of Malicorne and Manicamp, approached the Franciscan, and asked him which he would prefer, the room or the apartment.

The Franciscan inquired their situation in the hotel.

He was informed that the room was on the first story and the apartment on the second.

"Then let me have the room," said he.

Aramis did not insist, and with entire submission—

"Prepare the room," said he to the host.

And, bowing with respect, he withdrew to the apartment.

The Franciscan was immediately carried up to the room.

And now is not this respect of a prelate for a mere monk a most surprising circumstance—and this man a monk of a mendicant order—to whom was thus given, without his having even requested it, a room which so many travellers ambitioned?

How also can be explained the unexpected arrival of Aramis at the Beautiful Peacock—he, who having entered the palace with M. Fouquet, might have lodged in the palace with him?

The Franciscan endured being carried upstairs without uttering a complaint, although it could be seen that his sufferings were great, and that each time the litter knocked against the wall or against the ballusters, he experienced a terrible shock through his whole frame.

At last as soon as he had got into the room,

"Help me to get into that arm-chair," said he to the bearers.

The latter placed the litter on the floor, and raising the invalid as gently as was possible, they removed him to the arm-chair which he had indicated, and which was near the head of the bed.

"Now," added he with much softness of tone and gesture, "request the landlord to come upstairs."

They obeyed.

Five minutes afterwards the landlord of the Beautiful Peacock appeared upon the threshold of the door.

"My friend," said the Franciscan to him, "dismiss these worthy people, they are vassals of the Count de Melun. They found me fainting with heat upon the road, and without inquiring whether their care would be remunerated they wished to take me to their homes; but I know what the hospitality given to a sick man must cost to the poor, and I preferred being brought to this hotel, where, moreover, I was expected."

The host looked at the Franciscan with astonishment; the Franciscan made the sign of the cross with his thumb and in a peculiar manner on his breast.

The host replied by making the same sign on his left shoulder.

"Yes, father," said he, "it is true

you were expected; but we had hoped to see you in better health."

And as the country people were looking with astonishment at this before proud innkeeper who had suddenly become so humble in the presence of a poor monk, the Franciscan drew from the bottom of his capacious pocket three or four pieces of gold which he showed them.

"Here, my friends," said he, "is wherewith to pay the care which may be taken of me. Therefore you need be under no apprehension in leaving me here. My brotherhood, for whom I am travelling will not allow me to beg; only, as the attention you have paid me is deserving of reward, take these two louis, and go your way in peace."

The countrymen did not dare accept, the host took the two louis from the hand of the monk and placed them in that of one of the countrymen. The four bearers retired, their eyes expressing greater astonishment than ever.

The door being closed again, and the landlord standing respectfully near it, the Franciscan meditated for a moment.

Then he pressed to his jaundiced brow his feverish hand, and with his convulsed fingers tremblingly rubbed his grisly beard.

His large eyes rendered hollow by sickness and agitation, appeared to be following in vague space, a painful and inflexible idea.

"What physician have you at Fontainebleau?" he at length inquired.

"We have three, father."

"What are their names?"

"In the first place Linguet."

And besides—"

"Then a Carmelite monk, called brother Hulert."

"And the other?"

"A secular, named Grisart."

"Ah! Grisart?" murmured the monk, "send quickly for M. Grisart."

The host moved quickly in obedience to this order.

"By-the-by, what priest have you near at hand?"

"What priest?"

"Yes, and of what order?"

"There are Jesuits, Augustines and Cordeliers; but, father, the Jesuits are the nearest. I shall therefore send for a Jesuit confessor shall I not?"

"Yes; go at once."

The innkeeper left the room.

It will be imagined that by the sign

of the cross exchanged between them the host and the monk had recognized in each other two affiliated brethren of the redoubtable company of Jesuits.

When alone, the Franciscan drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, of which he with scrupulous attention examined several. However the violence of his malady overcame his courage.

His eyes turned, a cold perspiration burst from his brow, and he felt almost fainting, his head thrown back and his arms hanging listlessly by the sides of his arm-chair.

He had been motionless for about five minutes, when the innkeeper returned with the physician to whom he had scarcely allowed time to dress himself.

The noise they made on entering the room, the current of air occasioned by the opening of the door, recalled the invalid to his senses. He hastily seized his scattered papers and with his long and emaciated hand concealed them under the cushion of his arm-chair.

The host withdrew leaving the invalid and the physician alone.

"Come now," said the Franciscan, "come now M. Grisart, come nearer, for there is no time to be lost, feel my pulse, examine, judge and then pronounce sentence."

"Our host informs me," replied the physician, "that I have the happiness to offer my assistance to one of the affiliated."

"To an affiliated, yes," replied the Franciscan, "tell me then, the truth, I feel very ill; it appears to me I am about to die."

The physician took the monk's hand and felt his pulse.

"Oh! oh!" said he, "a dangerous fever."

"What do you term a dangerous fever?" asked the monk, with an impatient look.

"To an affiliated of the first or second year," replied the physician, interrogating the monk with a glance, "I would say a curable fever."

"But to me?" said the Franciscan.

The physician hesitated.

"Look at my gray hairs, and my brow furrowed with thought," continued he, "look at the wrinkles by which I count my trials. I am, Monsieur Grisart, a Jesuit of the eleventh year."

The physician started with surprise.

And indeed a Jesuit of the eleventh

year was a man initiated in all the secrets of the order, one of those men for whom science has no longer any secrets, society no barriers, temporal obedience no further tie.

"Thus," said Grisart, bowing with respect, "I find myself in the presence of a master."

"Yes, and therefore act in consequence."

"And you wish to know—"

"My real state."

"Well, then," said the physician, "you have a brain fever, called an acute meningitis, which has reached its highest point of intensity."

"Then there is no hope; is it not so?" demanded the Franciscan, in a sharp tone.

"I do not say that," replied the doctor, "however, considering the disordered state of the brain, the shortness of your breathing, the quickness of your pulse, the fiery heat of the terrible fever which is consuming you—"

"And which has felled me to the ground three times since this morning."

"And therefore did I call it terrible; but how then can you have continued your journey?"

"I was expected here; it was necessary I should reach this place."

"Even had it killed you."

"Even had it killed me."

"Well, then, taking into consideration all these symptoms, I must tell you that your state is almost desperate."

The Franciscan smiled with a singular expression.

"What you have now said is perhaps as much as you ought to say to an afflicted even of the eleventh year; but as to what is due to me, master Grisart, it is too little, and I have a right to exact more. Come now, let us be more truthful even than that, let us be frank, as if we were now both speaking before God; moreover, I have already sent for a confessor."

"Oh! but I hope, notwithstanding—" stammered the doctor.

"Answer me," said the sick man, showing with a dignified gesture a golden ring, the engraved stone of which had, until then, been turned inside the hand, and which bore the representative sign of the society of Jesus.

Grisart uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"The general!" cried he.

"Silence!" said the Franciscan, "you will now feel that it is necessary to speak the truth."

"My lord! my lord! call in your confessor, for in two hours this attack will be redoubled; you will be seized with delirium, and in that crisis you will expire."

"Ah! this is well," said the sick man, whose brow was momentarily contracted, "I have then two hours before me?"

"Yes; and above all if you will take the draught that I shall send you."

"Will that insure me two hours?"

"Two hours."

"I would take it were it even poison, for these two hours are necessary, not only for myself, but for the glory of the order."

"Oh! what a loss! what a catastrophe for us!"

"It is the loss of a man, and that is all," replied the Franciscan, "and God will provide a worthy successor to the poor monk who is about to leave you. Farewell, Monsieur Grisart, the Lord has shown his mercy in allowing me to meet with you. A physician who had not been affiliated to our holy congregation would have allowed me to remain in ignorance of my state, and still calculating on some days existence, I might not have taken the necessary precautions. You are a learned man, M. Grisart, and that is an honor to us all. It would have been painful to me to have found one of our brethren but of ordinary capacity in his profession. Adieu, master Grisart, adieu, and send your cordial quickly."

"At least, my lord, give me your blessing."

"In spirit, yes in spirit I say to you, *anima*, master Grisart, *viribus impassibile*."

And he fell back into his arm-chair almost again fainting.

Master Grisart hesitated between giving him some momentary relief, or whether he should run at once for the promised cordial. He no doubt decided in favor of the cordial, for he rushed out of the room and disappeared down the staircase.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE STATE SECRET.

A FEW moments after Doctor Grisart had left the room, the confessor entered it.

He had scarcely passed the thresh-

old of the door when the Franciscan cast upon him a searching look.

Then shaking his feeble head—

"This is a man of little mind," murmured he to himself, "and I hope that God will pardon me for dying without the assistance of this living infirmity."

The confessor, on his part, looked with astonishment and almost with terror at the dying man: he had never seen eyes that were so brilliant at the moment they were about to close forever, a look so terrible at the moment it was to be extinguished.

The Franciscan made a rapid and imperative sign with his hand.

"Sit down there, good father, and listen to me."

The Jesuit confessor, a worthy priest, a simple and ingenuous neophyte, who knew nothing of the order but his initiation, obeyed the evident superiority of the penitent.

"There are in this hostelry several persons," continued the Franciscan.

"But," said the Jesuit, "I thought that I had come here to receive a confession. Is it a confession you are making?"

"Why this question?"

"To know if I should consider what you say to me as secret."

"My words are uttered under the seal of confession; I confide them to your duty, as a confessor."

"Tis well," said the priest, seating himself in the arm-chair, which the Franciscan had with great difficulty left, to lie down on the bed.

The Franciscan continued,

"There are, I say, several persons in this hostelry."

"I have heard so."

"The number of these persons should be eight."

The Jesuit made a sign, that he understood him.

"The first to whom I wish to speak," said the dying man, "is a German from Vienna, he is called the Baron de Westpur. You will do me the pleasure to go to him, and tell him, that he, whom he expected has arrived."

The confessor, with some astonishment looked at his penitent, the confession seemed somewhat singular.

"Obey!" said the Franciscan, with the irresistible tone of command.

The good Jesuit, altogether subjugated, rose and left the room.

When the Jesuit left the room the Franciscan again referred to the papers,

which the attack of fever had compelled him to lay aside.

"The Baron de Westpur, good!" said he, "ambitious, stupid, narrow minded."

He folded up the papers and pushed them under his bolster.

Rapid steps were heard approaching from the end of the corridor.

The confessor returned followed by the Baron de Westpur, who walked with head erect as if he intended to brush the ceiling with his long feather.

And therefore at the sight of the Franciscan with his gloomy looks and the mean appearance of the room, the German inquired,

"Who sent for me?"

"I did," said the Franciscan.

Then turning towards the confessor,

"My good father," said he "leave us for a moment; when this gentleman goes out you will return."

The Jesuit left the room, and doubtless took advantage of this momentary exile from the presence of the dying man to ask the landlord for some explanations with regard to this extraordinary penitent, who treated his confessor as a valet de chambre.

The baron approached the bed and was about to speak, but the Franciscan compelled him to be silent.

"Moments are precious," said the latter hastily, "you have come here as a candidate, have you not?"

"Yes, father."

"You hope to be elected general?"

"I do hope so."

"You know on what conditions you can alone attain that high rank, which makes a man the master of kings, and equal to the pope?"

"Who are you," said the baron, "that you should subject me to this interrogatory?"

"I am he whom you expected."

"The elector-general."

"I am the elected."

"You are—"

The Franciscan did not give him time to conclude his question, he stretched forth his emaciated hand, and on that hand shone the ring of the general.

The baron started back with surprise, then instantly bowing with profound respect.

"What!" exclaimed he, "you, here, my lord? you in this poor chamber? you on that miserable bed! you seeking and selecting the future general, that is to say, your successor?"

"Do not concern yourself with regard to that, sir, fulfil quickly the principal condition, which is to reveal to the order a secret of such importance, that one of the great courts of Europe shall, by your mediation become forever infected to the order. Well! are you in possession of that secret, as you promised that you would be in your demand addressed to the grand council?"

"My lord—"

"But let us proceed in due order. You are then the Baron de Wostpur?"

"Yes my lord."

"This letter is your hand-writing?"

The general of the Jesuits drew a paper from his bundle and presented it to the baron.

The baron glanced his eyes over it, and with an affirmative sign:

"Yes, my lord, that letter was written by me."

"And you can show me the answer given by the secretary of the grand council?"

"Here it is, my lord."

The baron handed to the Franciscan a letter bearing this address.

"To His Excellency the Baron de Wostpur."

And containing only this phrase.

"From the 16th to the 22d of May—
Fontainebleau Hotel du Beau Pain.

A. M. D. G.*

"'Tis well!" said the Franciscan, "we are now in presence. Speak."

"I have a corps of troops composed of fifty thousand men, all the officers of it are gained over. My camp is on the Danube. I can in four days overthrow the emperor, who is, as you know, opposed to the progress of our order, and replace him by either of the princes of his family, whom the order may designate."

The Franciscan listened without giving any sign of existence.

"Is that all?" said he.

"There is an European revolution in my plan," said the baron.

"'Tis well, Monsieur de Wostpur, you will receive an answer. Return to your apartment, and leave Fontainebleau in a quarter of an hour."

The baron left the room walking backwards, and as obsequiously as if he had been leaving the presence of that emperor he was about to betray.

"That is not a secret," murmured the Franciscan, "it is merely a conspiracy."

"Moreover," added he, after a moment's reflection, "the fate of Europe no longer depends upon the house of Austria."

And with a red pencil which he held in his hand, he effaced the name of the Baron de Wostpur from his list.

"And now for the cardinal," said he, "from Spain we ought to have something more serious."

Then raising his eyes he perceived the confessor, who was waiting his orders like a school-boy.

"Ha! ha!" said he, remarking his submissiveness, "you have spoken to the host?"

"Yes, my lord, and to the physician."

"To Grisart?"

"Yes."

"He is there, then?"

"He is waiting with the draught he promised."

"'Tis well; should it be necessary I will call for him. You now understand all the importance of my confession, do you not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Well then, now go and fetch me the Spanish Cardinal Heredia. Make haste. This time then since you know the nature of the business, you will remain with me, for I feel faint."

"Shall I call the physician?"

"Not yet, not yet. The Spanish cardinal, that is all. Go."

Five minutes afterwards the cardinal entered the small room, pale and anxious.

"I learn, my lord—" stammered the cardinal.

"To the point, sir," said the Franciscan, in a faint voice.

And he showed the cardinal a letter written by him to the grand council.

"Is that your writing?" said he.

"Yes; but—"

"And your convocation?"

The cardinal hesitated to reply. His purple revolted against the idea of the poor Franciscan's coarse cloth gown.

The dying man stretched forth his hand and showed the signal.

The ring produced its effect, and so much the more effect, the greater the person upon whom the Franciscan exercised it.

"The secret, the secret, quickly," demanded the sick man, leaning on his confessor.

* Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

"*Coram isto?*" inquired the cardinal, anxiously.

"Speak in Spanish," said the Franciscan, inclining himself to listen with eager attention.

"You know, my lord," said the cardinal, continuing the conversation in the Castilian language, "that the condition of the marriage of the Infanta with the king of France was an absolute renunciation of the rights of the said infanta, as also of King Louis, to any appanage from the crown of Spain."

The Franciscan made an affirmative sign.

"The result of this is," continued the cardinal, "that the peace and alliance between the two countries depends upon the observance of this clause of the contract."

The affirmative nod was repeated by the Franciscan.

"Not only France and Spain, but the whole of Europe would be shaken by the infidelity of one of the parties."

Another nod from the sick man.

"The result of this is," continued the orator, "that the man who could foresee events, and give as positive that which is a mere cloudy vapor in the minds of most men, that is to say the idea of either good or evil which is hereafter to occur, that man would preserve the world from an immense catastrophe, or would turn to the advantage of our society the event which had been divined by the brain of the man who prepares it."

"*Pronto, pronto!*" murmured the Franciscan, turning pale, and clinging to the confessor.

The cardinal put his lips close to the ear of the dying man.

"Well then, monseigneur," said he, "I know that the king of France has determined on availing himself of the first pretext, a death for instance, whether it be of the king of Spain, or of a brother of the Infanta, to claim the inheritance, arms in hand, and I have the political plan fixed upon by Louis XIV. for this occasion already drawn up."

"The plan," said the Franciscan.

"Here it is," said the cardinal.

"By whose hand was it written?"

"By mine."

"Have you nothing further to communicate?"

"I think I have said much, my lord," replied the cardinal.

"That is true; you have rendered a great service to the order. But how

did you procure the details by aid of which you have formed this plan?"

"The under valets of the king of France are in my pay, and I receive from them all the papers which are thrown away, and have not been burned."

"That is ingenious," observed the Franciscan, endeavoring to smile; "Cardinal, you will set out from this hotel in a quarter of an hour: an answer will be sent to you."

The cardinal withdrew

"Call Grisart to me, and go and bring the Venetian, Marini."

While the confessor obeyed, the Franciscan, instead of erasing the name of the cardinal from his list, as he had that of the baron, drew a cross against his name.

Then, exhausted by the effort, he fell back upon his bed, murmuring the name of Dr. Grisart.

When he recovered himself he had drunk the half of a potion prepared by Grisart, the remainder of which was in a glass upon the table—he being supported by the physician, while the Venetian and the confessor were standing near the door.

The Venetian went through the same formalities as his two opposing candidates—like them hesitated at the sight of two strangers—but reassured by the general, who ordered him to speak in Italian, he revealed, that the pope, alarmed at the great power of the order, was combining a plan for the general expulsion of the Jesuits, and was intriguing in the courts of Europe to obtain their co-operation in the measure. He pointed out the auxiliaries of the pope, the manner in which he operated, and mentioned a place in the Archipelago, where, by a coup de main, two cardinals, adepts of the eleventh year, and consequently superior chiefs of the order, were to be transported, together with thirty-two of the most influential affiliated brothers in Rome.

The Franciscan thanked Signor Marini. It was not a slight service rendered to the order, the thus warning it of this pontifical project.

After which the Venetian received an order to leave Fontainebleau in a quarter of an hour—and withdrew exulting, as if he had already possession of the ring as well as supreme command of the order.

But while he was retiring the Franciscan murmured on his bed:

"All these men are mere spies or

police officers, not one of them is a general; all of them have discovered some plot, not one a secret. It is not by ruin, by murderous wars, by brute strength, that the order of Jesus should govern: it is by the mysterious influence which superior morality imparts. No, the man is not yet found, and, to crown this misfortune, God has stricken me and I am dying. Oh! must the order fall with me from the want of a supporting pillar. Must death, which now awaits me, also annihilate the destiny of the order? Oh! could I but have lived ten years longer, my life would have eternalized its glory, for its destiny was opening radiant and splendid with the reign of the young king."

These words, half thought, half uttered, the good Jesuit was listening to with terror, as we listen to the ravings of a person in delirium, while Grisart, a man of higher order of intellect, was devouring them as revelations from an unknown world, into which his sight plunged though his hand could not reach it.

Suddenly the Franciscan raised himself.

"Let us conclude this," said he, "for death is gaining on me. Oh! but a short while ago I should have died contentedly. I then hoped. But now, I fall, despairing, unless among those who remain—Grisart! Grisart! give me one hour more!"

Grisart approached the dying man and gave him a few drops to swallow, not of the draught which was in the glass, but from the contents of a phial which he had in his pocket.

"Call the Scotchman!" cried the Franciscan; call the Bremen merchant! call! Great God! I am dying! I am suffocating!"

The confessor rushed out to call for assistance—as if any human power could have restrained the hand of death, which was then weighing heavily on the sick man—but when he reached the door he there found Aramis, who, with one finger on his lips, like the statue of Harpocrates, the god of silence, restrained him with a look, and he drew back to the farther end of the room.

The physician and the confessor, after having consulted each other by a glance, made a movement as if to compel Aramis to withdraw. But the latter, with two signs of the cross, made

in different forms, nailed them both to the places where they stood.

"A chief!" murmured they simultaneously.

Aramis slowly walked into the room where the dying man was struggling in his first agonies.

As to the Franciscan, whether the elixir he had swallowed had produced its effect, or that the appearance of Aramis partially restored his energy, he made a movement, and with flaming eyes and distended mouth, his hair streaming with perspiration, sat upright in his bed.

Aramis felt that the heat of the room was suffocating; all the windows were closed, a fire was burning on the hearth, two yellow wax candles were burning on the table, and from the excessive heat forming large sheets of wax upon their brass candlesticks, and rendering the atmosphere still thicker by their dense vapor.

Aramis opened the windows, and then fixing on the dying man a look replete with intelligence and respect,

"Monseigneur," said he, "I pray you pardon me, for having intruded here without your orders; but your state terrifies me, and I thought that you might die before having seen me, for I was only the sixth upon your list."

The dying man seemed astounded and then examined his list.

"You are then he who in former days was called Aramis, after that, the Chevalier d'Herblay? You are then the bishop of Vannes?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"I know you; I have seen you."

"At the last jubilee. We met at the palace of his holiness,"

"Ah! yes, that is true; I now remember, and you have placed yourself on the list of candidates."

"Monseigneur, I have heard it said that the order required to be put in possession of a great state secret, and knowing that from modesty you had determined to resign your great office in favor of the man who should possess this secret, I wrote that I was willing to be a candidate, being the sole possessor of a secret which I think important."

"Speak," said the Franciscan, "I am ready to hear you and to judge of the importance of this secret."

"Monseigneur, a secret valuable as the one that I possess cannot be con-

municated by words. Every idea that has once issued from beyond the verge of thought, and has been vulgarized by any manifestation whatsoever, no more belongs to the one who has engendered it. Words may be picked up by an attentive and inimical ear, it must not therefore be wantonly divulged, for then the secret could no longer be called a secret."

"How then do you purpose to transmit this secret to me?" asked the dying man.

Aramis made a sign with one hand to the physician and the confessor to withdraw, and with the other he handed to the Franciscan a paper inclosed in a double envelope.

"And is not writing then," inquired the Franciscan, "even still more dangerous than speech—?"

"No, monseigneur," said Aramis, "for in that envelope you will find characters which you and I alone can comprehend."

The Franciscan gazed on Aramis, with greatly increasing astonishment.

"It is," continued the latter, "the cypher which you used in 1665 and which your secretary Juan Jujan, who is dead, could alone decipher, were he to revisit this world."

"You then know that cypher?"

"It was I who invented it and gave it to him."

And Aramis bowing gracefully and most respectfully was drawing near the door as if to leave the room.

But a gesture of the Franciscan accompanied by a recalling cry, arrested him.

"Merciful Lord," exclaimed the dying monk, "*ecce homo.*"

Then reading the paper a second time.

"Come quickly!" cried he, "come!"

Aramis approached the Franciscan with the same calm courage, and the same respectful air.

The Franciscan with outstretched arm was holding the paper which Aramis had delivered to him over one of the wax lights and burning it.

Then taking Aramis's hand he drew him close to him, saying,

"How and by whom can you have known such a secret?"

"By Madame de Chevreuse, the intimate friend and confidant of the queen."

"And Madame de Chevreuse?"

"Is dead."

"And is it known to others?"

"It was known to a man and woman of the lower class, and to them alone"

"What were they?"

"Those who had brought him up."

"What has become of them?"

"They are also dead—this secret destroys like fire."

"And you have outlived it?"

"No one knows that I am in possession of it."

"How long is it that you have known this secret?"

"Fifteen years."

"And you have not revealed it?"

"I wished to live."

"And will give it to the order from no ambitious motive, expecting nothing in return?"

"I give it to the order from ambitious motives and expecting a return," said Aramis, "for if you live, monseigneur, you can make of me now that you know me, that which I ought to be."

"And as I am dying," cried the Franciscan, "I make thee my successor—There."

And taking off the ring he placed it on the finger of Aramis.

Then turning towards the two spectators of this scene:

"Be witness," said he, "and attest it, should it be needful, that ill in body but sound in mind, I have freely and voluntarily delivered this ring, the emblem of all power to Monseigneur d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes, whom I appoint my successor, and before whom, I an humble sinner about to appear before God, I am the first to bow that all may take example from me."

And the Franciscan reverentially bowed his head, while the Jesuit and the physician fell on their knees.

Aramis, although he had become paler than the dying man himself, cast his eyes successively on every actor in this scene. Gratified ambition caused the blood to rush back upon his heart.

"We must be speedy," said the Franciscan; "that which I have still to do here presses upon me, devours me. I shall never be able to accomplish it."

"I will do it for you," said Aramis.

"Tis well!" replied the Franciscan.

Then addressing the Jesuit and the physician—

"Leave us to ourselves," said he.

They both obeyed.

"With this sign," continued he, "you are the man to move the whole

earth; with that sign you can throw down; with that sign you can build up. *In hoc signo vinces!*"

"Shut the door," said the Franciscan to Aramis.

Aramis pushed the bolt and returned to the bed-side of the Franciscan.

"The Pope has conspired against the order," said the latter; "the Pope must die!"

"He shall die!" said Aramis tranquilly.

"There is due a sum of seven hundred thousand livres to a merchant at Bremen. He came here to obtain the guarantee of my signature."

"He shall be paid," said Aramis.

"Six Knights of Malta, of whom you have here the names, have discovered, from the indiscretion of an affiliated of the eleventh year, the third mystery; it will be necessary to ascertain what use they have made of the secret, and take measures accordingly."

"That shall be done."

"Three of the affiliated, dangerous persons, must be sent into the deserts of Thibet, there to perish; they are condemned; here are their names."

"I will take care that the sentence shall be executed."

"Lastly, there is a lady of Antwerp, a grand-niece of Ravallac; she has certain papers in her possession which compromise the order. A pension of fifty thousand livres has been allowed to the family for the last fifty-one years. The pension is a heavy one; the order is not rich. Purchase those papers for a sum of money. Should it be refused—suppress the pension,—there is no risk."

"I will consider of it," said Aramis.

"A vessel, coming from Lima, should have arrived at Lisbon during the last week. The whole cargo belongs to the order. There are some cases, ostensibly filled with chocolate, but in reality with gold; each ingot is concealed beneath a layer of chocolate. The ship also belongs to the order. The cargo is worth seventeen millions of livres, which you will claim. Here are the bills of lading."

"To what port shall I direct the ship to come?"

"To Bayonne."

"If not prevented by adverse winds she shall be there in three weeks. Is that all?"

The Franciscan bowed his head affirmatively, for he could no longer speak; the blood was rising in his

throat and in his head, and burst out at his mouth, his nostrils, and his eyes.

The unhappy man had only time to press the hand of Aramis, and fell convulsed from his bed upon the floor.

Aramis placed his hand upon the poor Franciscan's heart—it had ceased to beat.

When stooping down Aramis remarked that a fragment of the paper he had given to the Franciscan had escaped the flames.

He picked it up and consumed it to the last atom.

Then unbolting the door and calling in the confessor and the doctor—

"Your penitent is now with God," said he to the confessor; "all he requires now are you prayers and the sepulchre of the dead. Go and prepare every thing for a private interment, such as is befitting a poor monk—go."

Then turning towards the physician, and observing his pale face and agitated features—

"Monsieur Grisart," said he, "empty that glass, and wash it; there is remaining in it too much of that which the grand council ordered you to put into it."

Grisart, astounded, terrified, and crushed, almost fell backward with surprise.

Aramis shrugged his shoulders in contempt, took the glass, emptied its contents into the fire upon the hearth, rinsed it, and placed it on the table.

And then he left the room, carrying with him the papers of the dead Franciscan.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MISSION.

On the next, or we should rather say the same day, for the events we have related terminated only at three in the morning, as the king went to chapel before breakfast with the two queens, as Monsieur, with the Chevalier de Lorraine, and some other of his favorite companions were getting on horseback to go down to the river for the purpose of taking one of those famous baths with which the ladies were so enraptured, as, in fine, Madame alone remained in the palace, who, under the pretext of indisposition, would not go

out. Montalais was seen, or rather was not seen, stealing out of the room appropriated to the maids of honor, dragging after her la Vallière, who concealed herself as much as possible, and both of them gliding through the gardens, and looking cautiously around them, at last reached a covered walk.

The weather was rather cloudy, the flowers and shrubs were drooping beneath the oppressive air, the burning dust from the high road was whirled in clouds to the summits of the trees.

Montalais, who during the whole way had played the part of a skilful scout, went on a few steps farther, and looking all around to ascertain that there was no one within hearing, nor coming towards them, returned to la Vallière.

"Well, thank heaven! we are at last perfectly alone. Since yesterday every body here is playing the spy: they form a circle round us at a distance as if we were infected with the plague."

La Vallière held down her head and heaved a deep sigh.

"In short, it is altogether astounding," continued Montalais, "from M. Malicorne up to M. Saint Aignan, every body wishes to catch our secrets. Come now, Louise, let us understand each other that I may know how to conduct myself."

La Vallière raised her soft blue eyes, pure as the azure of the heavens, and gazed at her companion.

"And as to myself," said she, "I will ask you why it was we were sent for to Madame's apartments, why it was we slept there instead of sleeping in our own rooms as usual, why it was you came in so late, and why this morning the strict watching to which we have been subjected?"

"My dear Louise, you are answering my question by another question, or rather, I should say, by ten questions, and that I do not consider answering me. I will tell you all that afterwards, and as they are matters of secondary importance you can wait. What I ask you is, and every thing will depend on that, whether there is or is not a secret?"

"I know not if there is a secret," said la Vallière, "but this I know, for my part, that I was very imprudent, both with regard to those foolish words and my more foolish fainting fit last night; since then, every one is making comments upon us."

"Speak for yourself my dear," said

Montalais, laughing, "for yourself and Tonnay Charente, who last night made your declarations to the clouds—declarations which most unfortunately were intercepted."

La Vallière bent down her head.

"In truth, you overwhelm me."

"Who, I?"

"Yes; these jests are killing me."

"Listen to me, Louise; these are not jests, for, on the contrary nothing can be more serious. I did not drag you away from the palace, I did not miss going to mass, I did not pretend to have the headache as Madame did, for she has no more of the headache than I have, I have not, in fine, displayed ten times more diplomacy than M. Colbert has inherited from M. Mazarin, nor than he practises with regard to M. Fouquet, in order that I might be able to relate to you my little sorrows, and for this sole purpose, that being alone and where no one can possibly overhear us, in order that you should play at hide and seek with me in this way. No, no, believe me, dear Louise, that when I question you it is not from mere curiosity, it is because the position is indeed a critical one. What you said yesterday is known; upon that text every one is preaching. Every one enlarges upon it and adorns it with flowers of rhetoric according to their fancy; you had the honor last night, and you have still that honor this morning, to occupy the minds of the whole court, my dear girl, and the number of tender and witty sayings which are attributed to you, would make Mademoiselle Scudery and her brother burst with vexation, were they faithfully reported to them."

"Why, my good Montalais," said the poor girl, "you know better than any one what I said, since it was in your presence that I said it."

"Yes, I know that. But, good heaven! that is not the question. I have not forgotten even a syllable of the words you uttered; but did you think as you spoke?"

Louise became confused.

"More questions still!" she exclaimed, "oh! God, when I would give the world to forget what I have said, how is it that every one appears to have combined to recall it to my mind? Oh! this is really dreadful!"

"What is so dreadful? come now, speak."

"It is to have a friend who ought to spare me, who might counsel me, assist

In saving me, and who instead of this kills me, assassinates me."

"There! there!" cried Montalais, "after having said too little, you are now saying too much. There is no one thinking of killing you, not even of robbing you of a secret, but wish to have it of free will and not otherwise, for it is not only your interests that are concerned but our's also, and Tonnay Charente would tell you so, were she here, for, in short she last night asked me to converse with her in our room, and there I went after my Manicampian and Malicornian interviews, for I was informed on my return, which was rather late I must acknowledge, that Madame had sequestered the maids of honor, and that we were to sleep in her apartment instead of sleeping in our own. Now, Madame sequestered the maids of honor in order that they might not have time to concert matters, and this morning she shut herself up with Tonnay Charente with the same object. Tell me therefore, my dear friend, how far Athénais and I can calculate upon you, as we will tell you how far you can depend on us."

"I do not clearly understand the questions you put to me," said Louise, much agitated.

"Hem! on the contrary, it seems to me, you understand me perfectly: but I will state my questions more precisely, so that you may not have the resource of any equivocation. Listen, then.

"Do you love M. Bragelonne?"

"That is perfectly plain, is it not. Hey!"

To this question which fell like the first bombshell of a besieging army into the besieged town, Louise gave a start.

"If I love Racul, the friend of my infancy, my brother!"

"Why, no, no, no. There you are escaping me again, or rather, endeavoring to escape me, I do not ask you whether you love Raoul, the friend of your childhood, your brother—I ask you whether you love the Viscount de Bragelonne, your betrothed husband."

"Why, my dear Aure," cried Louise, "what an austere expression you give your words."

"There is no remission; I am not more nor less austere than usual. I ask you a question—answer that question."

"Most assuredly," said Louise, her voice much agitated, "you do not speak

to me as a friend, but I will answer you as a friend and a sincere one."

"Well, answer."

"I will do so. I have a heart that is full of scruples and ridiculous pride with regard to all that a woman should keep secret, and no one has in that respect read that which is in the recesses of my soul."

"I know that well. Had I been able to read it I would not question you, I should simply say to you, my good Louise, you have the happiness to know M. de Bragelonne, who is a handsome youth and a good match for a girl who has no fortune. M. de la Fère will leave something like an income of fifteen thousand livres to his son. You will then have, some day, fifteen thousand livres a year as the wife of his son; that is admirable. Do not look therefore, either to the right or the left, go frankly to M. de Bragelonne, that is to say to the altar to which he is to conduct you. And afterwards? Well, afterwards, according to his disposition you will either be emancipated, or a slave: that is to say, you will have the right to do every thing which people whether too free, or too much enslaved, generally do. That is, my dear Louise, what I would have said to you, had I read the recesses of your heart."

"And I would thank you," stammered Louise, "although the advice does not appear to me altogether good."

"Stay, stay, for immediately after giving it I should add, Louise, it is dangerous to pass whole days with your head bent down on your chest, your hands hanging listlessly, your eyes wandering; it is dangerous to choose out dark shadowy walks, and not to smile at all the amusements which enliven the heart of a young girl; it is dangerous to write with the point of your foot as you are now doing on the sand, Louise, and which you in vain attempt to efface, letters which much more resemble L's than B's; it is dangerous, in fine, to occupy one's mind with a thousand extravagant imaginations created by solitude and an aching heart. Such imaginations hollow the cheeks of a poor girl at the same time that they disturb her brain, so that on such occasions it is by no means rare to see the most agreeable person in the world become the most ungracious, the most intellectual become the most silly."

"Thanks, my beloved friend," gently replied la Vallière, "it is in your disposition to speak thus, and I thank you for speaking to me as your disposition prompts."

"And it is for those visionary dreams that I speak thus; therefore apply not to yourself more of those words than you think appertain to you. But stay, I can hardly remember a story now floating in my mind, of a vaporish and melancholy girl, for M. Dangeau explained to me the other day that the word melancholy is derived from two Greek words, one of which means *black* and the other *bile*. I was thinking as I said of a young girl who died of this *black bile*, because she had imagined that a prince, a king, or an emperor, I now forget which, but it matters not, pretended to adore her, while the prince, the king, or the emperor, which ever suits you best, was visibly in love elsewhere, and, strange to say, she did not perceive this, while all who surrounded her perceived it clearly, and considered the poor damsel but as a screen used to conceal the real passion. You laugh as I do at this poor mad girl, do you not, la Vallière?"

"I laugh, oh! yes," stammered Louise, pale as death; "yes, certainly I laugh."

"And you are right, for the thing is very amusing. The history or the tale, which ever you may call it, pleased me, and for that reason I remembered it, and now tell it you. Imagine to yourself, Louise, the ravages which such a melancholy would commit in your brain. As to myself, I resolved to tell you this story, for should such an event happen to either of us, we ought to be well convinced of this truth. To-day, it is a mere snare, to-morrow, it would be the jest of every one, the next day, 'twould be death."

La Vallière trembled and turned paler than before, if that were possible.

"When a king thinks of us," continued Montalais, "he takes care that we should know it; if we are the good he covets he knows how to obtain it. You see, then, Louise, that in such circumstances, and between young girls exposed to such a danger, we should not conceal any thing from each other in order that those hearts which are not melancholy should watch over those which may become so."

"Silence! silence!" exclaimed la Vallière, "some one is approaching."

"Some one is coming, indeed," said

Montalais, "but who can it be? Every body is at mass with the king, or gone to the river with Monsieur."

At the end of the avenue the two young girls almost immediately saw advancing beneath the green arcade, a young man of lofty stature and graceful demeanor who, with his sword under his arm, and his cloak thrown over it, and ready booted and spurred, saluted them from a distance with a soft smile.

"Raoul!" exclaimed Montalais.

"M. de Bragelonne," murmured Louise.

"He is the most fitting judge that could have presented himself to pass sentence on the cause we have been arguing," said Montalais.

"Oh! Montalais, Montalais, for pity's sake," cried la Vallière, "after having been cruel be not inexorable."

These words, pronounced with all the fervor of a prayer, effaced from Montalais' features, if not from her heart, every trace of irony.

"Oh! you are now as handsome as Amadis, Monsieur de Bragelonne," cried she, to Raoul, "and like him you are armed, booted, and spurred."

"A thousand respects, young ladies," replied Bragelonne, bowing.

"But tell us, why those boots?" inquired Montalais, while la Vallière, although she looked at Raoul with as much astonishment as her companion, nevertheless remained altogether silent.

"Why?" said Raoul.

"Yes," la Vallière ventured to murmur in her turn.

"Because I am about to leave Fontainebleau," replied Bragelonne, looking at Louise.

The young girl was struck with superstitious terror, and trembled violently.

"About to leave us!" she exclaimed, "where then are you going?"

"My dear Louise," said the young man, with that placidity which was natural to him, "I am going to England."

"And for what purpose are you going to England?"

"The king sends me there."

"The king!" at once exclaimed both Louise and Aure, who involuntarily exchanged a glance, recalling to their minds the conversation which had just been interrupted.

Raoul had caught this transitory glance, but could not comprehend it.

He, however, naturally attributed it

to the interest which the two young ladies felt for him.

"His majesty," said he, "has been pleased to remember that the Count de la Fère is favorably considered by King Charles II. This morning, therefore, before going to mass, the king seeing me on the way, made a sign to me. I then approached him. 'Monsieur de Bragelonne,' said he, 'you will call on M. Fouquet, to whom I have given letters for the King of Great Britain; of those letters you will be the bearer.'

"I bowed.

"Ah! before setting out," he added, "you will wait upon Madame, and offer to take charge of any commissions she may have for the king, her brother."

"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Louise, at once pensive and much agitated.

"So quickly! you are ordered to set out so quickly!" cried Montalais, paralyzed by this extraordinary event.

"To duly obey those whom we respect," said Raoul, "we must obey quickly. In two minutes from the time I received the order, I was ready. Madame, having been informed of this, is writing the letter which she will do me the honor of intrusting to my charge. During this time, being informed by Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente that you were in this part of the gardens, I came, and have found you both."

"And both of us much indisposed, as you perceive," said Montalais, in order to come to the aid of her friend, whose countenance was becoming visibly agitated.

"Indisposed!" repeated Raoul, taking the hand of Louise de la Vallière with tender anxiety, "oh! it is true, indeed, your hand is cold as ice."

"It is nothing."

"That coldness does not reach the heart, does it, Louise?" asked the young man with a soft smile.

Louise suddenly raised her head, as if the question had emanated from some suspicion, and had awakened remorse.

"Oh! you know," she replied, making a violent effort to restrain her feelings, "you know my heart can never be cold towards such a friend as you, Monsieur de Bragelonne.

"Thanks, Louise! I know your heart, and I know your soul; and it is not by the contact of the hand, that such tenderness as yours is to be judged. Louise, you know how much I

love you, with what confidence and devotedness I have consecrated my life to you: you will, therefore, pardon me: will you not, if I speak to you somewhat childishly."

"Speak, Monsieur Raoul," said Louise, trembling with emotion; "I am all attention."

"I cannot leave you bearing with me a torment, which I know is absurd, but which tears my heart."

"Will you then be so long absent?" asked la Vallière in an agitated tone, while Montalais turned away her head.

"No, I do not expect to be away more than fifteen days."

La Vallière pressed her hand upon her heart, which felt as if it were breaking.

"It is most singular," pursued Raoul, looking with melancholy tenderness at Louise, "I have often left you when about to engage in perilous enterprises. I have then set out joyously, my heart free, my mind intoxicated with views of happiness to come, with future hopes, and yet I was then about to be exposed to the cannon balls of the Spaniards or the sharp halberts of the Walloons. To-day, I am going, having no danger to encounter, no anxiety to overcome, by the most commodious road in the whole world, to seek a recompense promised me by this favor of the king—I am going, perhaps, to obtain you. For what more precious favor than yourself could the king grant to me? Well, Louise, I know not why it is, but all this happiness, all this blissful future, flies before my eyes like some fantastic vision, some chimerical dream, and I have here—here in the depth of my heart—a settled grief, an inconceivable sinking, something cold, inert and death-like, as a dead corpse. Oh! I well know why this is, Louise; it is because I have never so much loved you as at this moment: oh! great God! great God!"

On hearing this last exclamation, issuing as it were from a broken heart, Louise burst into tears, and fell into the arms of Montalais.

The latter, although not of the most tender nature, felt that her eyes were overflowing, and her heart ached as if compressed by an iron girdle.

Raoul saw the tears of his betrothed. His eyes could not penetrate, did not even attempt to penetrate beyond these tears. He bent one knee to the ground and tenderly kissed her hand.

'Twas evident that all his heart was in that kiss.

"Rise! rise!" cried Montalais, almost sobbing, "for here comes Athénais."

Raoul dusted his knee with his glove, smiled once more at Louise, who no longer looked at him, and having pressed Montalais' hand with fervent friendship, he turned round to bow to Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, the rustling of whose silk dress could be heard as it swept over the ground of the avenue.

"Has Madame finished her letter?" he inquired, as soon as Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente was within hearing.

"Yes, viscount, the letter is finished, folded and sealed, and her royal highness is waiting for you."

Raoul on hearing this allowed himself scarcely time to bow to Athénais, cast a last look at Louise, made a last sign to Montalais, and hurried off in the direction of the palace.

But he once or twice turned round to look again, till he got out of the avenue, when he could see Louise no longer.

On their side the three young girls had with very diverse feelings observed him as he was retiring.

"At length," said Athénais, being the first to break this silence, "at length we are alone and can freely talk upon the grand affair, and understand each other with regard to the conduct we are to pursue. Now, if you will lend me your attention," continued she, looking all around her, to ascertain that no one could overhear her, "I will explain to you as briefly as possible, first of all our duty as I comprehend it, and if you do not understand me at once, the will of Madame."

And Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente emphasized these last words in such a way as not to allow her companions to have any further doubt of the official character of her communication.

"The will of Madame!" exclaimed la Montalais and Louise at the same instant.

"Ultimatum!" cried Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, diplomatically.

"But, good heaven! mademoiselle, does Madame know then—" murmured la Villière.

"Madame knows a great deal more than we said," replied Athénais, accentuating every syllable; "therefore, mesdemoiselles, we must be very cautious."

"Oh! yes!" cried Montalais, "and therefore am I listening with both ears. Speak on, Athénais."

"Oh, God! oh, God!" murmured Louise, trembling, "shall I survive that cruel evening!"

"Oh! do not terrify yourself in this manner," said Athénais; "we have found a remedy."

And seating herself between her two companions, she took a hand of each and clasped them in her own.

Above the whisperings of her first words might be heard the noise of the galloping of a horse upon the pavement of the high road, without the palace gates.

CHAPTER L.

AS HAPPY AS A PRINCE

AT the moment he was about to re-enter the palace Raoul had met Guiche.

But before meeting Raoul, Guiche had met Manicamp, who had met Malicorne.

And how was it that Malicorne had met Manicamp? Nothing could be more simple—he had waited for him on his return from mass, to which he had been together with M. de Saint Aignan.

On meeting, they had congratulated themselves on their good fortune, and Manicamp had taken advantage of the opportunity to ask his friend if there were not some crowns remaining in the bottom of his pocket.

Malicorne, without being at all astonished at this question, and which perhaps he had expected, answered that every pocket, from which money was constantly drawn without putting any thing in it, resembles a well which supplies water during the whole of winter, but which gardeners during the summer season at length exhaust; that his pocket, (Malicorne's) was undoubtedly of a tolerable depth, and that it was pleasant to draw from it in times of abundance, but, unfortunately, the abuse of its abundance had completely dried it up.

To which Manicamp, very pensively, had replied—

"That's reasonable."

"The question, therefore, is now how it is to be filled again," observed Malicorne.

"Undoubtedly; but how?"

"Why, nothing can be more easy, my dear Manicamp."

"Good! but say on."

"An office in Monsieur's household, and the pocket will be filled again."

"But you have that office."

"That is to say I have the name of it."

"Well?"

"Yes, but the name without the office is the purse without the money."

"That's reasonable," again said Manicamp.

"Well, then, let us pursue all measures to obtain the office," urged the titular officer.

"My dear, my very dear friend," sighed Manicamp, "to ask an office of Monsieur is one of the serious difficulties of our position."

"Oh! oh!"

"Undoubtedly. We can ask nothing of Monsieur at this present moment."

"And why so?"

"Because we are on cold terms with him."

"How absurd!" cried Manicamp.

"Bah! and if we are paying our court to Madame," said Manicamp, "speak frankly, can we be pleasing to Monsieur?"

"Precisely; if we are paying our court to Madame, and manage matters cleverly, we ought to be adored by Monsieur."

"Hem!"

"Or we are simpletons; therefore, lose no time, M. Manicamp, you who are so great a politician, to make up matters between M. de Guiche and his royal highness."

"Come, now, tell me, what did you learn from M. de Saint Aignan, Malicorne?"

"Why, nothing, he merely questioned me, that's all."

"Well, then, he was less discreet with me."

"He gave you some information, you?"

"He told me that the king is madly in love with Mademoiselle de la Valière."

"We know that, by heaven!" ironically replied Malicorne, "and every body is talking loudly enough about it for you to know it; but in the mean time, do, I beg of you, as I have advised you, speak to M. de Guiche and endeavor to persuade him to take some step towards a reconciliation with Monsieur. What, the deuce! he really owes that to his royal highness."

"But for this I must see Guiche."

"There does not appear to me to be much difficulty in that; in order to see him do what I have done to see you—wait for him. You know that he is naturally very fond of walking."

"Yes, but where does he walk?"

"A pretty question, truly. He is in love with Madame, is he not?"

"So it is said."

"Well, then, he will be sure to walk in the neighborhood of Madame's apartments."

"And see, my dear Malicorne, you are not mistaken in your guess, for here he comes."

"And why should you imagine I could be mistaken; have you remarked that I am habitually so?—speak. But the principal affair is that we should understand each other. Let us see—you are in want of money, are you not?"

"Ah!" lamentably sighed Manicamp.

"As to myself, I want my office. Let Malicorne have the office, Manicamp shall have the money. There lies all this mighty difficulty."

"Well, then, make yourself easy. I will do all I can."

"Do so."

Guiche was advancing, Malicorne walked off, Manicamp caught hold of Guiche.

The count was pensive and gloomy.

"Tell me what rhyme you are seeking after, my dear count," said Manicamp; "I have an excellent one to match yours, above all if your line ends in soul."

Guiche shook his head, and recognizing his friend, he took his arm.

"My dear Manicamp," said he, "I am seeking something more important than a rhyme."

"What is it you are seeking?"

"And you shall assist me in finding what I am searching for," continued the count; "you are a lazy fellow, that is to say, one whose mind is full of ingenious contrivances."

"I am sharpening my ingenuity already, count."

"These are the facts. I wish to get into a house, to which my affairs lead me."

"You must begin by going towards that house," said Manicamp.

"Good; but that house is inhabited by a jealous husband."

"Is he more jealous than the dog Cerberus?"

"No, not more; but as much so."

"Has he three throats like that most desperate guardian of the infernal region? Oh! do not shrug your shoulders; my dear count, I ask this question with perfect reason, seeing that poets pretend in order to soften master. Cerberus the traveller must carry a cake with him. I, who see things more in prose, that is to say, as they really are, I say that one cake is very little for three mouths; if your jealous man has three throats, take three cakes with you."

"Manicamp, did I require such advice as that I should go to M. de Beaurtru for it?"

"In order to have better, count," replied Manicamp, with comic seriousness, "you must then state your case in a clearer manner than you have done to me."

"Oh! if Raoul were but here," cried Guiche, "he would at once understand me."

"I believe so too, and above all were you to say to him, I should much wish to see *Madame*, but am afraid of *Monsieur* who is jealous."

"Manicamp," cried the count, angrily, and endeavoring to crush his tormenter with a look.

But the railer did not appear to feel the slightest emotion.

"What is the matter then, my dear count?" inquired Manicamp.

"How is it thus you profane the most sacred names?" exclaimed Guiche.

"What names?"

"Monsieur, Madame, the first names of the kingdom."

"My dear count you are most strangely in error, I did not mention the first names of the kingdom. I replied to you with regard to a jealous husband you had not named to me, but who necessarily must have a wife. I, as I said, replied to you."

"To see *Madame* you must make friends with *Monsieur*."

"Sorry jester," said the count, smiling, "was it that you said?"

"Not a word more."

"'Tis well then."

"But now," added Manicamp, "if you wish to speak of *Madame* the duchess, or *Monsieur* the duke, I would tell you, let us get near the house, whatever house it may be, for these are tactics which cannot in any case be unfavorable to your love."

"Ah! Manicamp, a pretext, a good pretext, find one for me."

"A pretext! by heaven! a hundred pretexts, a thousand pretexts; if Malicorne were but here he would already have found you fifty thousand excellent pretexts."

"And who the deuse is this Malicorne?" cried the count, closing his eyes like a man endeavoring to recall something to his mind, "it seems to me that I know that name."

"You believe you know that name! I think you do indeed! Why you owe thirty thousand crowns to his father."

"Ah! yes, it is that worthy youth from Orleans."

"To whom you promised an office in the establishment of Monsieur—not the jealous husband—the other Monsieur."

"Well! since your friend Malicorne has so much wit, let him find me out some means of being adored by Monsieur, let him find me some pretext for making my peace with him."

"Be it so, I will speak to him on the subject."

"But who is that coming toward us?"

"It is the Viscount de Bragelonne."

"Raoul! yes, so it is indeed."

And Guiche advanced rapidly to meet him.

"It is you, my dear Raoul?" said Guiche.

"Yes, and I was seeking you to bid you farewell, my dear friend," replied Raoul, pressing the count's hand, "ah! good day, M. Manicamp."

"How! are you going to leave us, viscount?"

"Yes, I am off—a mission from the king."

"Where are you going?"

"To London. I am at this moment going to wait upon Madame, who is to give me a letter for his majesty Charles II."

"You will find her alone, for Monsieur is gone out."

"And where is he gone?"

"To the river, to bathe."

"Then, my dear friend, as you are one of Monsieur's gentlemen, be pleased to undertake to make my excuses to him. I would have waited his return to receive his orders, if his majesty and M. Fouquet also, had not manifested a desire that I should lose no time."

Manicamp jogged de Guiche's elbow. "There is the pretext for you," said he.

"And what is it?"

"Why, M. de Bragelonne's excuses."

"A weak pretext," said de Guiche.

"An excellent one if Monsieur is not still indisposed towards you; bad, as would be every other if Monsieur is still enraged against you."

"You are right, Manicamp, a pretext be it what it may, is all I need. Well then, a good journey to you, my dear Raoul."

Upon which the two friends embraced each other. Five minutes after this Raoul entered Madame's apartment, as Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente had requested him.

Madame was still seated by the table at which she had written her letter; before her was burning the rose colored wax-light with which she had sealed her letter; but from her preoccupation, for Madame's mind was much preoccupied, she had forgotten to extinguish this wax-light.

Bragelonne was expected, he was announced the moment he made his appearance.

Bragelonne was elegance personified, it was impossible to see him once without always remembering him; and not only Madame had seen him once, but it will be remembered that he was one of the first to meet her and had accompanied her from Havre to Paris.

Madame had therefore retained a pleasing recollection of Bragelonne.

"Ah!" said she, "you are come, sir. You are about to visit my brother who will be happy to pay to the son, some portion of the debt of gratitude he has contracted towards the father."

"The Count de la Fère, madam, has been abundantly rewarded for the little he had the happiness to do for the king, by the goodness which the king has manifested towards him, and it is I who will bear to him the assurance of the respect, the devotedness, the gratitude of both the father and the son."

"Did you know my brother, viscount?"

"No, your highness; it will be the first time I shall have the happiness to see his majesty."

"You have no need of recommendation to him, but should you doubt your own personal merit, you may boldly name me as your respondent, and I will not belie you."

"Oh! your highness is too good."

"No; M. de Bragelonne I well remember that we have travelled together, and that I remarked your great wisdom, amidst the extreme follies committed to your right and left by two of the

greatest madmen in this world, Messieurs de Guiche and Buckingham. But let us not speak of them, we will speak of you. Are you going to England for the purpose of seeking your establishment?—excuse my question—it is not curiosity, but the desire of being useful to you, that dictates it."

"No, madam; I am going to England to fulfil a mission which his majesty has been pleased to confide to me, and that is all."

"And you calculate on returning to France."

"The moment my mission is accomplished, unless indeed, King Charles II. should give me other orders."

"Of one thing I am certain, that he will request you to remain with him as long as it may be possible."

"Then, as I should not be able to refuse him I would at once request your royal highness to be pleased to remind the King of France that one of his most devoted servants is at a distance from him."

"Beware, that when he shall recall you, you do not consider his order as an abuse of power."

"I do not precisely comprehend, madam—"

"The court of France is, I know, incomparable. I know it well; but we have also some pretty women at the court of St. James."

Raoul smiled.

"Oh!" cried Madame, "that is a smile which bodes no good to my country-women. It is as if you intended telling them, M. Bragelonne, 'I have come to see you, but I have left my heart on the other side of the channel.' Is it not precisely that which your smile conveyed?"

"Your highness has the gift of reading even into the depths of the soul," said Raoul. "You now fully comprehend why any prolongation of my stay in England would be most painful to me."

"And it is not necessary that I should ask whether so worthy a cavalier is duly beloved in return."

"Madam, I was brought up with her I love, and I believe that she entertains the same sentiments towards me that I do towards her."

"Well then, depart speedily, Monsieur de Bragelonne, and return quickly. On your return we shall see two happy faces; for I trust, there is no obstacle to your happiness."

"There is a great one, madam."

"Really! and what is that?"

"The will of his majesty."

"The will of the king! does the king then oppose your marriage?"

"Or, he at least defers it. I requested his consent to it through the Count de la Fère; and without absolutely refusing it, he intimated positively that we must wait for it."

"Is the person whom you love unworthy of you?"

"She is worthy the love of a king, madam."

"I meant to say: perhaps her rank does not equal yours."

"She is of excellent family."

"Young, handsome?"

"Seventeen years old, and, in my eyes, most beautiful."

"Is she in the country or at Paris?"

"She is at Fontainebleau, madam."

"At court?"

"Yes."

"Do I know her?"

"She has the honor to belong to the household of your royal highness."

"Her name!" anxiously demanded the princess, "unless, indeed," said she, checking herself, "her name should be a secret."

"No, madam, my love is sufficiently pure for me not to make a secret of it to any one, and more particularly to your royal highness, who has been so kind to me. It is Mademoiselle Louise de la Vallière."

Madame could not restrain an exclamation in which there was more than an expression of astonishment.

"Ah! said she, 'la Vallière—she who, yesterday'—and she paused—"was so much indisposed, I believe"—continued she.

"Yes, madam; it was only this morning that I was informed of the accident which had happened to her."

"And you have seen her before coming here?"

"I have had the honor to say farewell to her."

"And you say," said Madame, making an effort to restrain her feelings, that the king has—deferred—your marriage with that child?"

"Yes, madam, deferred."

"And gave he any reason for thus deferring it?"

"None, whatever."

"And how long ago was it that the Count de la Fère applied to the king?"

"More than a month, madam."

"'Tis very strange!" said the prin-

cess; and something like a cloud passed over her eyes.

"A month," she repeated.

"About that time."

"You are right, viscount," said the princess, with a smile, which Bragelonne might have observed was somewhat constrained, "my brother must not detain you long out yonder: therefore make good speed, and the first letters that I write to England shall be to call you back again in the king's name."

And Madame rose to give her letter into the hands of Bragelonne.

Raoul comprehended that his audience had terminated; he took the letter, bowed to the princess, and left the room.

"A month!" murmured the princess; "can I have been blinded to such a degree as this? can he have loved her for a whole month?"

And as Madame had nothing else to do, she began the letter to her brother, the *postscript* of which was to recall Bragelonne.

The Count de Guiche, as we have seen, had yielded to the arguments of Manicamp, and had allowed him to drag him to the stables, where they ordered their horses to be saddled; after which they went along the small avenue we have already described, to meet Monsieur, who, on issuing from his bath, was returning to the palace, much refreshed, wearing a woman's veil over his face, to prevent the sun, which already had great power, from injuring his complexion.

Monsieur was in one of those fits of good humor, every now and then inspired by the admiration of his own beauty. While in the water he had been able to compare the superior whiteness of his own skin with that of his courtiers; and, thanks to the excessive care which his royal highness bestowed upon his person, even the Chevalier de Lorraine could not compete with him.

Monsieur had moreover swum with a certain degree of success; and with his nerves well toned by this salutary immersion in the refreshing element, his mind and body were in the most happy state of equilibrium.

And therefore on seeing Guiche who was advancing at a canter on a magnificent gray charger to meet him, the prince could not restrain a joyful exclamation

"It seems to me that all is going well," said Manicamp who thought he could perceive in the countenance of his royal highness an indication of kindness and good humor.

"Ah! good morning, Guiche, good morning my poor Guiche!" cried the prince.

"All hail Monsieur!" replied Guiche, encouraged by the tone of voice in which the prince had spoken, "health, joy, prosperity and happiness attend your highness!"

"You are welcome, Guiche, and come here on my right, but hold in your horse, for I intend to return at a foot pace under these cool arcades."

"I am at your orders, monseigneur."

And Guiche took his station to the right of the prince as he had been requested.

"Come now, my dear Guiche," said the prince, "come now, give me some little news of that Guiche whom I knew in former days and who paid court to my wife."

Guiche blushed to the very whites of his eyes, while Monsieur laughed as if he had uttered the wittiest joke in the world.

Some of the privileged courtiers who surrounded Monsieur thought it incumbent on them to imitate him, although they had not heard a word he said, and they all burst into a loud laugh, which, taken up by the first was echoed by the whole suite down to the last.

Guiche although blushing, managed to keep his countenance; Manicamp looked at him.

"Ah! monseigneur," replied Guiche, "be charitable towards an unhappy man; do not immolate me to the Chevalier de Lorraine."

"And how so?"

"If he should hear you rallying me in this way, he would go even farther than your royal highness, and would banter me most pitilessly."

"Upon your love, upon the princess?"

"Oh! monseigneur, for mercy's sake!"

"Come now, come now, Guiche, acknowledge that you did cast tender eyes on the princess."

"I will never acknowledge such a thing, monseigneur."

"From respect for me, well, I absolve you from this respect, Guiche. Avow it, as if you were speaking of Mademoiselle de Chalais, or Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

Then checking himself,

"Well; this is capital!" said he again beginning to laugh, "now I am playing with a two-edged sword. I am striking you and my brother at the same time, Chalais and la Vallière, your affianced bride, and his future one."

"In truth, monseigneur," said the count, "you are to-day in a most adorable humor."

"In good truth, it is so; I feel well, and the sight of you gives me pleasure."

"Thanks, monseigneur."

"You were vexed with me?"

"Who, I, monseigneur?"

"Yes, you."

"And for what, good heaven?"

"Because I interrupted your sara-bands and your Spanish tricks."

"Oh! your highness!"

"Come now, do not deny it. You left the princess's room that day with furious eyes, and that brought you ill luck, my dear Guiche, for you danced the ballet yesterday in a most pitiful manner—you must not take the sulks, Guiche, it is unfavorable to you, for then you look like a bear—If the princess looked at you yesterday, there is one thing I am certain of."

"And what is that, monseigneur? Your highness alarms me."

"That she will altogether have renounced you."

And the prince laughed more heartily than ever

"Decidedly," thought Manicamp, "rank makes not the slightest difference, they are all precisely alike."

The prince continued,

"But you have, at last, returned, and there is now some chance of the chevalier becoming once more amiable."

"How can that be, monseigneur, and by what miracle can I possess such influence over M. de Lorraine?"

"It is plain enough; he is jealous of you."

"Ah! do you really think so?"

"It is just as I have said."

"He does me too much honor."

"You understand that when you are here, he caresses me; when you are gone, he martyrizes me, I reign only by see-saw, and besides you know not the idea I have just conceived."

"I cannot even guess at it."

"Well, when you were in exile, for you have been in exile, my poor Guiche—"

"No doubt, monseigneur, and whose fault was that?" cried Guiche affecting a sulky tone.

"Oh! certainly it was not mine, dear count," replied his royal highness, "I did not request the king to exile you, on the honor of a prince!"

"Not you, monseigneur, I am well convinced of that—but—"

"But, Madame! oh! as to that I will not say no. What the deuce! was it then you did to Madame?"

"In truth, monseigneur—"

"Women have their petty hatreds, I know that well, and my wife is not exempt from that defect. But if she caused your exile, I am not angry with you."

"In that case, monseigneur, I am but half unfortunate," said Guiche.

Manicamp, who was riding close behind Guiche, and who lost not a word of his conversation with the prince, bent forward till his hat nearly touched his horse's neck, to conceal the laughter which he could not repress.

"Moreover your exile has set my imagination to work, and I have formed a project."

"Good."

"When the chevalier, seeing you no longer here felt sure of reigning alone, he treated me ill, and seeing that instead of being like that ill-natured fellow, my wife behaved so amiably and so kindly to me, though I neglect her, I had the idea of becoming a perfectly model husband, a rarity, a curiosity at court. I had the idea of falling in love with my wife."

Guiche looked at Monsieur with an air of stupefaction which was by no means assumed.

"Oh!" stammered Guiche, trembling with anxiety, "surely, monseigneur, you never could have seriously entertained such an idea."

"Yes, in good earnest, I have plenty of money which my brother gave me just before my marriage; she has money also, and a great deal, since she receives both from her brother and her brother-in-law, from England and from France. Well, we should have left the court, I would have retired to my chateau at Villars Cotterets, which belongs to my appanage, and stands in the midst of a wood in which we would have played the perfect lovers, and in the same places where my grandfather Henry II. used to meet the beautiful Gabrielle. What say you to that idea, Guiche?"

"I say that it is enough to make one shudder, monseigneur," replied Guiche, "he really did shudder."

"Ah! I see that you cannot bear the idea of being exiled a second time."

"Who I, monseigneur?"

"I will not, therefore, take you with us, as I had at first intended."

"How! with you, monseigneur?"

"Yes, if perchance I should be again seized with the idea of falling out with the court."

"Oh! monseigneur," cried Guiche, "let me not be a hindrance, I will follow your highness to the end of the world."

"How can you be so maladroit," grumbled Manicamp, spurring his horse, and pushing against Guiche, almost throwing him out of the saddle.

Then as he left him pretending that his horse had become unmanageable—

"Think for a moment what you are saying," whispered he.

"Then," said the prince, "it is agreed, since you are so devoted to me, I take you with me."

"Wherever you please, monseigneur, any where," joyously replied Guiche, "every where, and this instant if you will; are you ready?"

And Guiche laughingly gave his horse the rein, which bounded two steps forward.

"One moment," said the prince, "we must first go to the palace."

"And for what purpose?"

"To take my wife, by heaven!"

"How?" said Guiche.

"Undoubtedly; did I not tell you it was a project of conjugal love, and, naturally, I must take my wife with me?"

"Then, monseigneur," replied the count, "I am much afflicted at it, but there is no Guiche for you."

"Really?"

"Yes, so it is. Why would you take Madame?"

"Why? why because I perceive I love her."

Guiche slightly changed color, endeavoring, however, to preserve his apparent gaiety.

"If you love Madame, monseigneur," said he, "that love ought to suffice to you, and you have no further need of your friends."

"Not so bad, not so bad," muttered Manicamp.

"There now, there," cried the prince, "your fear of Madame is coming over you again."

"I am so, monseigneur, and with good reason, too, a woman who caused me to be exiled."

"Oh! good heaven! what a horrid disposition yours is, Guiche: how you bear malice, friend."

"I should like to see you in the same position, monseigneur."

"Decidedly, it must have been on that account you danced so badly yesterday; you wished to revenge yourself upon Madame, and put her out in the ballet. Ah! Guiche, this is too pitiful, and I will tell Madame of it."

"Oh! you may tell her any thing you will, monseigneur; her highness will not hate me either more or less than she now does."

"Gently, gently, you exaggerate matters, and all for a poor fifteen days' compulsory residence in the country which she imposed upon you."

"Monseigneur, fifteen days are fifteen days, and when spent in wearying one's self to death they are an eternity."

"So that you will not forgive her."

"Never."

"Come, come, Guiche, be not so spiteful. I will make your peace with her; you will acknowledge, when you know more of her, that she is by no means ill-disposed, and is full of wit."

"Monseigneur."

"You will see that she knows how to receive her company as a princess, and laugh as heartily as a citizen's wife. You will see that she manages, when she pleases, to make hours fly by like minutes. Guiche, my friend, you must change your opinion with regard to my wife."

"Decidedly," said Manicamp to himself, "here is a husband who is predestined to be unfortunate. Why King Candaule was a perfect tiger in comparison with Monseigneur."

"In short," added the prince, "you will form a very different opinion of my wife, Guiche, that I will answer for, only I must direct your course. She is no common place woman, and it is not every one that finds the way to her heart."

"Monseigneur—"

"No resistance, Guiche, or we shall really be angry," rejoined the prince.

"But since he will absolutely have it so," whispered Manicamp into de Guiche's ear, "satisfy him, and at once."

"Monseigneur," said the count, "I shall obey you."

"And as a beginning, as the card-party is to be to-night in Madame's apartments, you shall dine with me, and I will take you there."

"Oh! as to that, monseigneur," replied Guiche, "you will permit me to resist."

"What, again! why, this is downright rebellion."

"Madame received me too ungraciously yesterday, before all the world."

"No, really!" cried the prince, laughing.

"And so much so that she did not even reply to me when I spoke to her. It is all very well not to have too much self-love, but too little is too little, as they say."

"Count, after dinner you will go home and dress, and you will return to call for me; I shall wait for you."

"Since your highness positively commands me."

"Positively."

"He will not budge from that," said Manicamp; "and these are precisely the sort of ideas which husbands most obstinately insist upon. Ah! why did not Molière hear all this? he would have put it into verse upon the spot."

Thus conversing the prince and his court reached the coolest apartments of the palace.

"By the by," said Guiche, when on the threshold of the door, "I had a commission to your royal highness."

"Well, execute your commission, then."

"M. de Bragelonne has gone to London by the king's order, and he charged me to present his humble respects to you."

"Well, a good journey to the viscount, for whom I have a great liking. Now, go and dress yourself, Guiche, and return to us. And if you do not return—"

"What would then happen, monseigneur?"

"Why, I would have you thrown into the Bastille, that is all."

"Well," said Guiche, laughing, "decidedly his royal highness Monsieur is the counterpart of her royal highness Madame. Madame sends me into exile because she does not like me enough, and Monsieur has me imprisoned because he likes me too much. Thanks, Monsieur; thanks, Madame."

"Come, come," said the prince, "you are a charming friend; you well know I cannot live without you. So return quickly."

"Be it so; but it pleases me to be coquettish in my turn, monseigneur."

"Bah!"

"And therefore, I will not again enter your highness' service but on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"I have a friend of a friend of mine to oblige."

"And you call him?"

"Malicorne."

"A vile name."

"But well borne, monseigneur."

"Be it so. Well?"

"Well, I owe M. Malicorne a place in your household, monseigneur."

"A place! what sort of a place?"

"Any place whatever. As inspector or something of that sort."

"By Jove! that falls out well; it was only yesterday that I dismissed the master of the apartments."

"Well, let him be master of the apartments, monseigneur. What will he have to do?"

"Nothing; excepting to inspect and report—"

"An interior police?"

"Exactly."

"Oh! how well that will suit Malicorne," cried Manicamp, venturing to join in the conversation.

"Do you know the person in question?" inquired the prince.

"Intimately, monseigneur; he is my friend."

"And your opinion is?"

"That you, monseigneur, can never have a master of the apartments equal to him."

"How much is the office worth?" inquired the count, addressing Monsieur.

"That I know not; but I have always been told that it could not be too largely paid when it was well filled."

"What do you call being well filled, prince?"

"That needs no explanation, when the person filling the office is a man of intellect."

"Then I believe that you will be well satisfied, monseigneur, for Malicorne has as much wit as the devil himself."

"Good! the office then will be rather reluctant to me," said the prince, laughing. "You are making me a valuable present, count."

"I really believe so, monseigneur."

"Well, then, go and announce to your M. Malicorne—"

"Malicorne, monseigneur."

"I shall never be able to accustom my mouth to that name."

"You can say Manicamp correctly enough, monseigneur."

"Oh! I could also say Manicorne well enough; custom would assist me."

"Call him so, if you please, monseigneur, and I promise you that the inspector of your apartments will not feel hurt at it. He has one of the most happy dispositions that can be imagined."

"Well, then, my dear Guiche, announce to him his nomination; but wait a moment."

"For what, monseigneur?"

"I wish to see him first; should he be as ugly as his name I shall retract."

"You know him already, monseigneur."

"Who, I?"

"Undoubtedly. You saw him at the Palais Royal, and of this I am certain for I myself presented him."

"Ah! now I recollect him. The deuce, why he is a very handsome fellow."

"I was sure, monseigneur, that you must have remarked him."

"Yes, yes, yes; do you see, Guiche, I am very particular on this point. I would not that either my wife or myself should have constantly before our eyes some horrid fright. It might have very unpleasant consequences. My wife shall have for maids of honor only the very prettiest girls, and my gentlemen must all be handsome and well made."

"That is powerfully argued, monseigneur," observed Manicamp, who had by his looks and gestures approved the prince's harangue as he went on.

As to Guiche, he doubtless had not conceived this reasoning to be so excellent, for he did not utter an opinion on it, but merely bowed, and his bowing, even, was of a very undecided character.

Manicamp hurried away to inform Malicorne of the good news.

Guiche retired with much seeming reluctance to put on a court dress.

Monsieur, singing, laughing, and admiring himself in the glass at length reached the dinner hour, and in a disposition of mind which would have justified the proverb "as happy as a prince."

CHAPTER LI.

HISTORY OF A DRYAD AND A NAIAD.

EVERY one in the palace had partaken of the evening collation, and after that had attired themselves in their court dresses.

The collation was usually taken at five o'clock.

Let us allow one hour for the collation and two hours for the toilette; every one would therefore be ready towards eight in the evening.

And about that time the courtiers began to present themselves in Madame's apartments, for as we have before mentioned, it was Madame who received that evening.

And every body was particularly careful not to miss one of Madame's soirées, for those evenings were passed in a continued delight which the young queen, that excellent and pious princess, had not been able to communicate to similar assemblies. It is, unfortunately, one of the disadvantages of goodness that it amuses less than a lively evil mind.

We must however hasten to say that the term evil mind was not an epithet that could be justly applied to Madame.

Her nature, so truly pre-eminent, contained too much real generosity, too many noble impulses and refined reflections to be deemed an evil nature.

But Madame had the gift of resistance, a gift so often fatal to those who possess it, for it is snapped where any other would bend. The result of this was, that blows aimed at her were not deadened as those directed against the well protected conscience of Marie Therese.

Her heart rebounded at each new attack, and similar to the aggressive *quintains* of the game of the ring, Madame, if she were not struck in such a way as to stun her, returned blow for blow to the imprudent man, be he whom he might, who dared to tilt against her.

Was this wickedness, or was it merely mischief? We opine that rich and powerful natures are those which similar to the tree of knowledge, produce at once both good and evil; a double branch, always blooming, always fruitful, of which those who hunger after it can always distinguish the good fruit, and the parasites and use-

less ones die after eating the evil fruit, which is no great harm.

Thus Madame, who had her plan for a second queen, or even a first queen, well arranged in her own mind, Madame, we say, rendered her house agreeable by conversation, by persons meeting, by the perfect liberty she allowed to all of uttering their thoughts, upon the condition, however, that such thoughts should be witty or useful. And yet, would it be believed, that on this very account people spoke less when at Madame's parties than elsewhere.

Madame hated mere babblers, and avenged herself cruelly upon them.

She allowed them to talk.

She also hated pretension, and did not even pass over this defect in the king.

It was the malady of Monsieur, and Madame had undertaken the prodigious task of curing him.

Moreover, poets, men of talent, beautiful women, she welcomed all as a mistress superior to her slaves. Sufficiently pensive amidst all her flights of fancy to set the poets dreaming, having sufficient personal charms to shine even among the loveliest, sufficiently witty to be listened to with pleasure even by the most intellectual men of the day; with these advantages it will be readily conceived that her soirées attracted all the world; all the young hastened thither. When the king is young, all are young at court.

And therefore was it that all old ladies were much out of humor; all the great leaders during the regency or the last reign. But all the displeasure of those venerable persons, who had carried the spirit of domination so far as to command parties of soldiers in the war of the Fronde in order, as Madame said that they might not lose their empire over men, was met with raillery and laughter.

At eight o'clock, her royal highness entered the great drawing-room, attended by her ladies of honor, and found there several courtiers, who had been waiting some ten minutes.

Among all these precursors of the appointed hour, she searched for him who, in her opinion, ought to have arrived before any one of them. But she did not find him.

But almost at the moment she had terminated this scrutiny, Monsieur was announced.

Monsieur was absolutely y'endid.

All the jewels which had belonged to Cardinal Mazarin—those be it understood which the minister could not do otherwise than bequeath—all the jewels of the queen-mother, even some of those belonging to his wife, Monsieur had on that day bedecked his person with. Monsieur was brilliant as the sun.

Behind him, advancing with slow steps, and with an air of compunction perfectly well played, came Guiche, dressed in a suit of pearl-gray velvet, embroidered with silver, and trimmed with blue ribbons.

Guiche wore, besides, Mechlin lace, which was as magnificent of its kind as were the jewels of the prince.

The feather in his hat was red.

Madame had several favorite colors.

She liked red for hangings, gray for dress, and blue for flowers.

Thus attired, Guiche's beauty was of a nature to be remarked by all. A certain interesting paleness, a certain languor about the eyes, hands of most delicate whiteness beneath splendid lace ruffles, a mouth expressing melancholy; it was, in fine, only necessary to see M. de Guiche, at once to acknowledge that few men at the court of France could equal him.

The result of this was, that Monsieur, who would have had the pretension to eclipse a star—had a star placed itself in comparison with him—was, on the contrary, eclipsed in every mind by Guiche.

Madame had but vaguely looked at Guiche; but as vague as was that look it had called a charming blush into her face. Madame indeed had found Guiche so handsome and so elegant that she almost ceased to regret the royal conquest which she felt was on the point of escaping her.

Her heart, therefore, in despite of itself, allowed the blood to rush from it to her cheek.

Monsieur, then assuming his petulant air, approached her. He had not observed the blushing of the princess; or if he had, he was far from attributing it to its real cause.

"Madam," said he, kissing his wife's hand, "there is here a poor disgraced man, an unhappy exile, whom I have taken upon myself to recommend to you. Be pleased to well observe that he is one of my best friends, and that your giving him a gracious welcome will greatly please me."

"What exile, what disgraced man?" cried the princess, looking all around

her, and not fixing her eyes upon the count more than on any other person.

This was the moment to bring forward his protégé. The prince stepped on one side and allowed Guiche to pass him, who, with a somewhat disconcerted look, approached Madame and made his bow.

"What!" cried Madame, as if experiencing the greatest possible astonishment, "is it the Count de Guiche who is this disgraced man, this exile?"

"Why, yes," rejoined the duke.

"Why," exclaimed Madame, "one sees no one else here!"

"Ah! madam, you are unjust," said the prince.

"Unjust?"

"Undoubtedly. Come now, forgive the poor youth."

"Him! pardon him for what? for what have I to pardon M. de Guiche?"

"But, come now, Guiche, explain yourself. What is it you wish should be pardoned?" urged the prince.

"Alas! her royal highness knows full well," replied the count, hypocritically.

"Come, come, give him your hand, madam," said Philippe.

"If it will give you pleasure, monsieur."

And with an indescribable movement of her eyes and shoulders, Madame held out her lovely hand to the young man, who pressed his lips to it.

We must believe that this pressure continued for some time, and that Madame did not withdraw her hand too quickly, for the duke added—

"Guiche is not spiteful, madam, and certainly he will not bite you."

The company present made this saying a pretext, although it was not very risible, to laugh most heartily.

In fact the situation was in itself peculiar, and some good, charitable souls did not fail to remark it.

Monsieur was still enjoying the effect produced by his saying, when an usher announced the king.

We shall now attempt to describe the appearance of the drawing-room at that moment.

Before the fire-place, which was loaded with flowers, was seated Madame, with her ladies of honor on each side of her, forming two wings, about which the butterflies of the court were fluttering.

Other groups occupied the recesses of the windows; and from their respective places they could hear the conversation of the principal group.

From one of these groups, and the nearest to the chimney, Malicorne—promoted, during the afternoon's sitting, by Guiche and Manicamp, to the post of Master of the Apartments—Malicorne, whose clothes had been ready for some weeks, blazed in his gold lace, darting his rays on Montalais, who was at the extreme left of the wing from Madame, with all the fire of his eyes and the reflection of his crimson velvet.

Madame was talking with Mademoiselle de Chatillon and Mademoiselle de Créquy, her two neighbors, addressing a few words now and then to Monsieur, who made way the moment this announcement was uttered:

"The king!"

Mademoiselle de la Vallière, like Montalais, was seated on the left of Madame; that is to say, the last but one of the wing. On her right hand had been placed Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente. She was therefore in the position of those corps of troops, whose weakness is suspected, and which are placed between two bodies of known valor.

Thus flanked by her two companions in adventure, la Vallière, whether it was that she felt grieved at Raoul's departure, or that she was still agitated by recent events which had begun to popularize her name in the world of courtiers, la Vallière, we say, concealed behind her fan her somewhat reddened eyes, and appeared to be giving great attention to words which Montalais and Athénais were alternately whispering into her ears.

When the name of the king was heard a general movement took place in the saloon.

Madame, as the mistress of the house, rose to receive her royal visiter, but on rising pre-occupied as she must have been, she darted a glance to her right, and this look which the presumptuous Guiche interpreted as being addressed to him, nevertheless was arrested and fixed on la Vallière, whose deep blushes and anxious emotion he might have remarked.

The king entered the centre of the group which had now become general, by the approach of all the various ones from every quarter of the room. All heads were bowed down before his majesty, the women bending like the weak and magnificent lily before King Aquilon.

His majesty evinced no sort of

hauteur, we will even say nothing royal on that evening excepting his youth and beauty.

A certain air of lively joy and of good humor, set every imagination at once in motion, and all present promised themselves a delightful evening, only from seeing the desire expressed in his majesty's eyes to amuse himself at Madame's party.

If any one could compare with the king in joyousness and good humor, it was M. de Saint Aignan, with rose colored garments face and ribbons, and rose colored ideas above all, for that evening M. de Saint Aignan was rich in ideas.

That which had given a fresh bloom to all the ideas which were germinating in his joyous mind, was that he had just perceived that Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente was attired in a rose colored dress. We would not however venture to assert that the artful courtier had not been previously informed that the lovely Athénais was to wear that color. He well knew the art of making a tailor or a femme de chambre talk on the projects of their mistress.

He darted as many assassinating glances at Athénais as he had bows of ribbons on his doublet and hose, that is to say a most furious quantity.

The king having paid his compliments to Madame, and Madame having been invited to resume her seat, the circle was immediately formed.

Louis asked Monsieur for particulars as to his bath; he stated, looking at the ladies, that poets were occupied in writing verses on the delightful amusements of the baths at Valvins, and that one of them above all, M. Loret, appeared to have become the confidant of one of the river nymphs, so many truths had he told in his sweet rhymes.

More than one lady conceived it necessary to blush.

The king took advantage of this moment to look around him at his ease; Montalais alone did not blush sufficiently to prevent her looking at the king, and she saw him devouring Mademoiselle de la Vallière with his eyes.

That courageous maid of honor, yecept Montalais, made the king cast down his eyes and thus saved Louise de la Vallière from a sympathetic fire which would perhaps have reached her with that look.

Louis was assailed by Madame who overwhelmed him with all sorts of

questions, and no person in the world knew how to question as she did.

But he endeavored to render the conversation general and in order to succeed, he redoubled his wit and gallantry.

Madame wished for compliments; she resolved to drag them out at any cost, therefore, addressing the king:

"Sire," she said, "your majesty who knows all that happens in your kingdom, must know the verses recited to M. Loret by that nymph: will your majesty be pleased to favor us with them?"

"Madam," replied the king in the most gracious tone, "I should not dare, for it is certain that you, personally, would feel some confusion at certain details—but Saint Aignan recites tolerably well, and has a good memory for verses, and should be not remember them, he can extemporize; I certify him to you as a poet of rich genius."

Saint-Aignan, thus brought into play, could not do otherwise than show himself in the least disadvantageous light; unfortunately for Madame he thought only of his own personal adventures, and instead of speaking of the compliments paid by the poet to Madame, and which she so much desired to hear, he began by thinking only of recounting and narrating his own good fortune in affairs of love.

Darting therefore his hundredth glance at the lovely Athénais, who all along practised her theory of the night before, that is to say, did not deign to look once at her adorer;

"Sire," said he, "your majesty will pardon me, doubtless, for not having retained the verses dictated to Loret by the nymph; but where the king could not remember, how could so weak a creature as myself—"

Madame received with some degree of indulgence this apology of the courtier.

"Ah! madam," added Saint-Aignan, "at this moment the question is no longer that which may have been said by river nymphs. In truth, it might be imagined that there is nothing now important transpiring in the liquid kingdoms. It is upon earth, madam, that great events are taking place. Ah! madam, upon earth, and on which.—"

"Good!" said Madame, "and what then is there happening on earth?"

"It is of the dryads," replied the count, "that you must ask that; the

dryads inhabit the woods, as your royal highness knows."

"I even know that they are naturally fond of gossiping, M. Saint Aignan."

"That is true, madam, but when they relate pretty and interesting matters, it would be ungracious to accuse them of gossiping."

"They do relate then pretty things?" inquired the princess in a negligent manner; "why, really, M. de Saint Aignan, you pique my curiosity, and if I were the king I should call upon you immediately to relate to us the pretty things which mesdames the dryads have said, since you alone appear to understand their language."

"Oh! on that head I am entirely at his majesty's commands," eagerly replied the count.

"He understands the language of the dryads!" exclaimed Monsieur, "what a fortunate man is this Saint Aignan."

"I understand it as well as French, Monsieur."

"Well, then, begin your story," said Madame.

The king felt confused. His confidant was doubtless about to launch him into a sea of difficulties.

He felt this so much the more from the earnest attention which the preamble of Saint Aignan had excited, and which was increased by the peculiar attitude of Madame. Even the most discreet among the courtiers appeared ready to devour every word the count was about to pronounce.

They coughed, they drew nearer, they cast furtive glances on certain maids of honor, who from modesty, or to sustain more firmly these inquisitorial looks which weighed so heavily upon them, arranged their fans, and assumed the appearance of duellists about to receive their adversary's fire.

CHAPTER LII.

CONTINUATION OF THE HISTORY OF A DRYAD AND A NAIAD.

In those days ingenious conversations and stories, with rather pointed though delicate allusions, were so much in vogue that where a company of our age would at once scent out scandal, uproar, tragedy, and would fly in terror from it, the company assembled in Madame's saloon arranged themselves

comfortably in their places, so that they might not lose a word or gesture of the comedy which M. de Saint Aignan had composed for his own advantage, and the winding up of which, whatever might be its style or its intrigue, must necessarily be perfect as to calmness and decorum.

The count was known to be a polished man, and an admirable narrator. He, therefore, commenced courageously amid a silence so profound, that to any other but himself it would have been intimidating.

"Madam, the king permits me, in the first place, to address myself to your royal highness, because you have proclaimed yourself to be the most curious in the company. I shall therefore have the honor to inform your royal highness that dryads, in general, select the hollows of oak trees for their habitations, and as these dryads are beautiful mythological beings, they choose the finest trees, that is to say, the largest they can find."

At this exordium, which recalled, under a most transparent veil, the famous story of the royal oak, which had played so great a part in the events of the preceding evening, so many hearts beat with joy or anxiety, that if Saint Aignan had not possessed a loud and sonorous voice, the palpitations of those hearts would have been heard.

"There must be dryads in the woods of Fontainebleau," said Madame, in a perfectly calm tone, "for never have I seen oaks more magnificent than in the royal park."

And saying these words she darted a look directly at de Guiche, of which he had no reason to complain as of the preceding one which, as we have said, had retained a certain air of vagueness most painful to a heart so loving.

"Precisely, madam, it was of Fontainebleau that I was about to speak to your royal highness," replied Saint Aignan, "for the dryad whose story is now occupying our attention inhabits the park adjacent to his majesty's palace."

The affair was engaged; the action had begun. Neither the auditors nor the narrator could draw back.

"Let us listen," said Madame, "for the story appears to me to possess not only the charm of a national legend, but also that of a contemporary chronicle."

"I must begin by the beginning," said the count. "Well, then, at Fon-

tainebleau there lived certain shepherds who inhabited a cottage of very elegant appearance.

"One of them was the shepherd Tyrsis to whom belonged the most rich domains, transmitted to him by inheritance from his father.

"Tyrsis is young and handsome, and his great qualities have made him the first among the shepherds of the country. It may even be boldly asserted that he is their king."

A slight murmur of approbation encouraged the narrator, who continued:

"His strength is equal to his courage. No one than him more skilful in the chase; no one more bold in attacking the wild beasts of the forest; no one possesses more wisdom in the councils. When managing a fiery horse in the beautiful plains he has inherited, or leading on the shepherds who obey him to games of skill or strength, it might be thought that Mars, the god of war, was brandishing his lance on the plains of Thrace; or, better still, Apollo, god of day, when beaming on the earth with his fiery darts."

It will be readily understood that the allegorical portrait of the king was not the worst exordium the narrator could have chosen. Nor did it fail to produce its effect upon his auditors, who, from duty and from the delight it inspired applauded vehemently. The king was also sensible to it, for praise pleased him when it was delicately administered, and did not always, displease him even when it was rather extravagant. Saint Aignan proceeded.

"But, ladies, it is not only in games of glorious daring that Tyrsis, the shepherd, has acquired that renown which has made him king of the shepherds—"

"Of the shepherds of Fontainebleau," said the king, smiling at Madame.

"Oh!" exclaimed, Madame, "Fontainebleau has been arbitrarily adopted by the poet, as for myself, I say of the whole world!"

The king bowed and resumed the attitude of a passive auditor.

"It is," pursued Saint Aignan amid flattering murmurs, "it is when in the presence of lovely shepherdesses that the great merit of this king of the shepherds shines forth most manifestly. He is a shepherd whose wit is as brilliant as his heart is pure; he turns a compliment with a grace which charms invincibly, and he loves with

a discretion which promises to all his amiable and happy conquests a fate worthy of envy. Whoever has seen Tyrsis and has heard him speak, cannot do otherwise than love him; who ever loves him and is beloved by him, has assuredly found happiness."

Saint Aignan here paused; he was enjoying the delight of complimenting; the portrait, grotesquely highflown as it was, had found pardon in certain ears, and above all in those to whom the merits of the shepherd did not appear exaggerated. Madame requested the reciter to continue.

"Tyrsis," said the count, "had a faithful companion, or, rather, a devoted servant, who was called—Amyntas."

"Ah! let us have the portrait of Amyntas," maliciously said Madame, "you are so excellent a painter, Monsieur de Saint Aignan."

"Madam!"

"Oh! Count de Saint Aignan, do not I beg of you sacrifice this poor Amyntas, I would never forgive you for it."

"Madam, Amyntas is of too inferior a condition, above all when compared to Tyrsis, for his happiness to have the honor of being put on a parallel. It is with certain friends as with those servitors of ancient times who insisted on being buried alive at the feet of their masters. At the feet of Tyrsis, there is the place of Amyntas; he demands no other, and if sometimes the illustrious hero—"

"Illustrious shepherd, you would have said," cried Madame, pretending to correct M. de Saint-Aignan.

"Your royal highness is right, I was mistaken," rejoined the courtier. "If, I was saying, the shepherd Tyrsis sometimes deigns to call Amyntas, friend, and to open his heart to him, it is an incomparable favor, and which the latter considers a most signal happiness."

"All this," said Madame, interrupting him, "establishes the absolute devotedness of Amyntas to Tyrsis, but does not give us the portrait of Amyntas. Count, you need not flatter it, be that as you please, but draw it for us. I will have the portrait of Amyntas."

Saint Aignan was compelled to do execution on himself, after having made a very low bow to the sister-in-law of the king.

"Amyntas," said he "is somewhat more advanced in years than Tyrsis.

He is a shepherd not altogether unfavored by nature; it is even said that the muses smiled upon his birth, as did Hebe upon his youthful years. He has not the ambition to shine, he has that of being loved, and perhaps he would not be thought unworthy were he better known."

This last paragraph, strengthened by a most murderous glance, was directed straight to Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, who bore the shock without evincing the least emotion.

But the modesty and adroitness of the allusion had produced a good effect. Amyntas reaped the fruit of it in continued applause; the head of Tyrsis himself gave the signal for it by a consent, full of expressive kindness.

"Now you must know," continued Saint Aignan, "that Tyrsis and Amyntas were one evening walking in the forest, talking of their disappointments in love—be pleased to note, ladies, that these are now the words used by the dryad herself, for otherwise how could we know what Tyrsis and Amyntas said, they the most prudent shepherds in the world? They had reached the thickest part of the forest, in order that they might be more secluded and be able more freely to communicate their mutual sorrows, when suddenly their ears were assailed by the sound of voices."

"Ah! ah!" cried several persons, near the narrator, "this is becoming more and more interesting."

Here, Madame, like to a vigilant general who inspects his army, with a look encouraged Montalais and Tonnay Charente who were flinching beneath this attack.

"These harmonious voices," rejoined Saint Aignan, "were those of certain shepherdesses who had also desired to enjoy the freshness of the evening under the shadow of the trees, and who knowing the spot to be a sequestered one and difficult of approach, had met there to communicate to each other some ideas with regard to shepherds."

An immense laugh raised by this phrase of Saint Aignan, an almost imperceptible smile from the king while looking at Tonnay Charente was the result of this expression.

"The dryad asserts," continued Saint Aignan, "that there were three shepherdesses, and that they were all young and beautiful."

"Their names," said Madame, very quietly.

"Their names!" cried Saint Aignan, who appeared to revolt against such an indiscretion.

"Undoubtedly; you have called your shepherds Tyrsis and Amyntas, give your shepherdesses some name or other."

"Oh! madam, I am not an inventor. I am purely and simply relating under the dictation of the dryad."

"And what name did your dryad give these shepherdesses? Really she must have a most rebellious memory. This dryad must surely have fallen out with the goddess Mnemosyne."

"Madam, these shepherdesses—but be so good as to remember that to reveal the names of women is a crime."

"From which a woman absolves you on the condition that you reveal the names of these three shepherdesses."

"They were called Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galathea."

"Ah! that is as it should be, and they have lost nothing by being obliged to wait a little," said Madame, "for they are charming names. And now their portraits."

Saint Aignan again made a dissenting gesture.

"Oh! let us proceed in due order, count, I beg of you," rejoined Madame, "tell me, sire, ought we not to have the portraits of these shepherdesses?"

The king, who had not expected this persistence, and who began to feel a certain vague uneasiness, thought it would not be well to irritate so dangerous a questioner. He thought, moreover, that in his portraits Saint Aignan would find means to slip in some delicate touches, pleasing to ears which his majesty had an interest to charm. It was with this fear, and with this hope, that Louis authorized Saint Aignan to trace the portraits of the three shepherdesses, Phyllis, Amaryllis and Galathea.

"Well, then, be it so!" cried Saint Aignan, with the air of a man who had made up his mind, and he began.

CHAPTER LIII.

CONCLUSION OF THE STORY OF A NAIAD AND A DRYAD.

"Phyllis," said Saint Aignan, casting a sly and defying glance at Montalais, as does a fencing-master in a match when about to attack a rival

worthy of his skill, and whom he invites to place himself in guard, "Phyllis is neither dark nor fair, nor tall nor short, nor cold nor too impassioned; she is, although a shepherdess, as witty as a princess, and as coquettish as a demon."

"Her sight is excellent. All that comes within the scope of her sight her heart desires. Like a bird that is always warbling, now flies close above the grass, then rises in pursuit of a butterfly; now perches itself on the summit of a tree, and there sits secure, defying the bird catchers to ascend to take her or to entrap her in their nets."

The portrait was so resembling that all eyes were turned on Montalais who, with audacious looks, and upturned head, was listening to M. de Saint Aignan with as much seeming unconcern as if he had been speaking of a perfect stranger.

"Is that all, M. de Saint Aignan?" inquired the princess.

"Oh! your royal highness, the portrait is but sketched, and there are many things which ought still to be added. But I fear to tire the patience of your royal highness, or to wound the modesty of the shepherdess, so that I will pass on to her companion, Amaryllis."

"That is well," said Madame, "pass on to Amaryllis, Monsieur de Saint Aignan, we follow you."

"Amaryllis is the elder of the three, and yet," hastily added Saint Aignan, "her great age numbers not twenty years."

The brow of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente which, at the first part of this phrase was somewhat knit, became again serene, and she slightly smiled.

"She is tall, with magnificently redundant hair, which she turns up in a bow, after the manner of the Grecian statues; she walks majestically, and her gestures are dignified, therefore has she the air of a goddess rather than a mortal, and among these the one she most resembles is Diana, goddess of the chase, with this sole difference, that the cruel shepherdess having one day purloined the quiver of the god of love, while poor Cupid was sleeping in a rose bush, instead of aiming her darts against the wild beasts of the forest, pitilessly shoots them at the poor shepherds who come within the range of her arrows and her eyes."

"Oh! the wicked shepherdess!" cried Madame, "and will she not some day

wound herself with one of those arrows which she lets fly so mercilessly right and left?"

"It is the hope of all the shepherds in general," said Saint Aignan.

"And that of the shepherd Amyntas in particular, is it not?" said Madame.

"The shepherd Amyntas is so timid," rejoined Saint Aignan, with the most modest air he could assume, "that if he does entertain such a hope, no one has ever known it, for he conceals it in the deepest recesses of his heart."

A murmur of the most flattering nature welcomed this declaration of devotedness pronounced by the narrator on behalf of the shepherd.

"And Galathea?" said Madame; "I am impatient to see a hand so skilful take up the portrait where Virgil left it, and finish it before our eyes."

"Madame," replied Saint Aignan, "in comparison with the great Virgilius Maro, your humble servant is but a sorry poet; however, encouraged by your commands, I will do my best."

"We are all attention," said Madame.

Saint Aignan stretched forth his foot, raised his arm, and went on with his portrait.

"Fair as the driven snow, with locks bright as the golden corn, she from them shakes rich perfumes to the wanton winds. Those who see her ask if she is not the beautiful Europa of whom Jupiter became enamored when sporting with her companions in the flowery meadows.

"From her eyes, blue as the azure heaven in clear summer days, falls a soft flame, engendered by sweet thought and fed by love. When she frowns or when she bends her head towards the earth, the sun veils itself in sign of mourning.

"On the contrary, when she smiles all nature resumes its joy, and the birds, hushed for a moment, renew their warblings from the deepest thickets.

"This shepherdess, this one in particular," continued Saint Aignan, "is worthy the admiration of the whole world, and should she ever bestow her heart, happy the mortal whom her virginal love shall thus transform into a god."

Madame, while listening to this portrait, which every one was listening to as she did, confined herself to showing her approbation only of the most poeti-

cal passages by sundry nods of the head, but it was impossible to discover whether these signs of assent were accorded to the talent of the narrator or to the resemblance of the portrait.

The result of this was that as Madame did not openly applaud, no one allowed himself to applaud, not even Monsieur, who thought in his heart that Saint Aignan was giving too much importance to the portraits of these shepherdesses.

The company therefore appeared of an ice-like colness.

Saint Aignan, who had exhausted all his powers of rhetoric and pencil in thus sketching the portrait of Galathea, and who expected, after the favor with which both the others had been received, to have heard rounds of applause attending this last one, Saint Aignan was more completely frozen than the king or any one of the assembly.

There was a momentary silence, which was at last broken by Madame.

"Well, sire," said Madame, "what says your majesty to these three portraits?"

The king wished to afford assistance to Saint Aignan, but without compromising himself.

"Why Amaryllis, in my opinion, is beautiful," said he.

"For my part, I like Phyllis better," said Monsieur; "she is a hearty girl, or rather, a fine lad of a nymph."

And every one laughed.

This time the looks were so directly aimed at her, that Montalais felt the color rising to her face till it was purple.

"And what was it these shepherdesses were saying to each other," said Madame.

But Saint Aignan, wounded in his self-love, was not in a state to sustain a new attack.

"Madam," said he, "these shepherdesses were acknowledging to each other their little tender preferences."

"Go on, go on, M. de Saint Aignan, you are a perfect stream of pastoral poetry," said Madame, with an amiable smile, which somewhat reanimated the abashed narrator.

"They were saying that love was a danger, but that the absence of love was death to the heart!"

"And from this they concluded—" urged Madame.

"So they concluded that they ought to love."

"Did they state on what conditions?"

"The condition of choosing," said Saint Aignan. "I ought even to add—remember it is the dryad who is speaking—that one of the shepherdesses, Amaryllis, I believe, was completely opposed to this idea of loving any one, and yet she did not altogether disavow having allowed a certain shepherd to have penetrated even to her heart."

"Was it Amyntas or Tyrsis?"

"Amyntas, madam," modestly said Saint Aignan; "but instantly Galathea—the soft-eyed Galathea—replied, that neither Amyntas, nor Alphesibaous, nor Tityreus, nor any of the handsomest shepherds of the country, could be compared to Tyrsis; that Tyrsis eclipsed all men, in the same manner that the oak eclipses all other trees in grandeur—the lily, all other flowers in majesty. She even drew such a portrait of Tyrsis, that Tyrsis, who was listening to her, must really have been flattered, notwithstanding his greatness. Thus Tyrsis and Amyntas had been remarked by Amaryllis and Galathea. Thus the secret of two hearts had been revealed under cover of the night and in the secret recesses of the forest."

"This madam, is what the dryad related—she who knows all that happens in the hollows of the oak trees and in the tufted thickets; she who knows the loves of the birds, who knows the meaning of their songs, who understands, in short, the language of the winds among the branches, and the hummings even of the gold and emerald colored insects in the petals of wild flowers: this did she say to me, and this have I repeated."

"And now you have concluded, have you not, Monsieur de Saint Aignan?" said Madame, with a smile that made the king tremble.

"That is the whole history, madam," replied Saint Aignan; "and happy am I if I have been able, during a few minutes, to amuse your royal highness."

"Minutes too short," replied the princess, "for you have perfectly related all you know; but my dear Monsieur de Saint Aignan you have had the misfortune to obtain your information from one dryad only: is not that the case?"

"Yes, madam, from one only; that I acknowledge."

"The result of this is that you passed

by a little, insignificant naiad, without perceiving her, but who knew much more than your dryad, my dear count."

"A naiad!" exclaimed several persons, who began to imagine that the story was about to have a sequel.

"Undoubtedly: by the side of that oak—and which is called the royal oak, as I believe at least—is it not so, Monsieur de Saint Aignan?"

Saint Aignan and the king looked at each other.

"Yes, madam," replied Saint Aignan.

"Well then, there is a pretty little spring which murmurs over pebbles, among sweet myasotis and gay daisies."

"I believe that Madame is right," observed the king, who was still anxious, and his respiration suspended, as it were, on the lips of his sister-in-law.

"Oh! such a brook exists, sire, and I can answer for it," said Madame; "and the proof is, that the naiad who reigns over that spring called to me as I passed by—I who am speaking to you."

"Really!" cried Saint Aignan.

"Yes," continued the princess; "and for the purpose of relating to me an infinity of things, which M. de Saint Aignan has not mentioned in his narrative."

"Oh! tell them then yourself; for you have a most charming mode of telling stories," said Monsieur.

The princess bowed on receiving this conjugal compliment.

"I shall not have the poetry of the count, nor his great talent in describing all the details."

"You will not be listened to with less interest," said the king, who anticipated something hostile in his sister-in-law's story.

"I am speaking, moreover, in the name of that poor little naiad," continued Madame, "who is the most enchanting demi-goddess that I have ever met. Now, she laughed so much during her recital that, in proof of the medical axiom that 'laughter is contagious,' I must ask your permission to laugh a little more while remembering her words."

The king and Saint Aignan, who observed on many countenances symptoms of that hilarity which Madame had predicted, at last looked anxiously at each other, inquiring by these glances whether under all this there was not some little conspiracy to be apprehended.

But Madame was fully resolved to turn and turn again the dagger in the wound; and therefore she continued with her air of ingenuous candor, that is to say, the most dangerous of all her airs.

"Well, as I said, I was passing that way, and perceiving a number of fresh blooming flowers, there is no doubt that Phyllis, Amaryllis, Galathea, and all your shepherdesses had passed that way before me.—"

The king bit his lips. The story became more and more threatening.

"My little naiad," continued Madame, "was warbling her little song in the bed of her brook; as I found that she accosted me by touching the hem of my dress, I did not think proper to treat her ungraciously, and with the greater reason that a divinity, even of a secondary order, is a greater personage than a mortal princess. Therefore, I saluted the naiad, and this is what she told me, laughing most heartily:

"Imagine to yourself, princess,—you understand, sire, that it is the naiad who is speaking."

The king made an assenting sign. Madame continued.

"Imagine to yourself, princess, that the margin of my brook has just been a witness to a most amusing spectacle. Two inquisitive shepherds, inquisitive even to indiscretion, have allowed themselves to be mystified in a most delightful manner by three nymphs, or three shepherdesses—I beg your pardon, but I do not precisely remember whether she said nymphs or shepherdesses. But that is of little import, is it not? We will therefore let it pass."

At this preamble the king visibly blushed, and Saint Aignan, completely out of countenance, began to stare in the most anxious manner possible.

"The two shepherds," pursued my little naiad, still laughing, "followed the traces of the young ladies"—no, I mean to say the three nymphs. Dear me! I beg your pardon, I should have said the three shepherdesses. Such conduct is not always prudent, it might inconvenience those who are so followed. I appeal to all these ladies, and I feel assured that not one here present would contradict me."

The king, much fearing what might come next, gave merely an assenting nod.

"But," continued the naiad, "the shepherdesses had seen Tyrsis and Amyntas glide into the wood, and with the aid of the moon had recognized

them in the avenue." Ah! you laugh!" cried Madame; "wait wait—we have not come to the end of it yet."

The king turned pale; Saint Aignan wiped his forehead, on which the perspiration was standing in large drops.

Among the groups of ladies might be heard slight titterings and secret whisperings.

"The shepherdesses, I was saying, observing the indiscretion of the shepherds, seated themselves beneath the royal oak, and when they imagined that their indiscreet listeners were near enough not to lose a word of what they were about to say, they innocently addressed to them, the most innocently possible, a most inflammatory declaration, which the self-love, natural to all men, and even to the most sentimental shepherds, induced the two auditors to consider sweet as the honey gathered on Hybla's flowery mount."

The king, upon these words, which the assembly could not listen to without laughing, looked around, his eyes flashing fire.

As to Saint Aignan, his head fell on his chest, but at length, wishing to conceal his profound mortification, he burst into a bitter laugh.

"Oh!" cried the king, rising and drawing himself up to his full height, "this is," said he, "a most charming jest, assuredly, and related by you in a manner still more charming; but really and positively, do you understand the language of the naiads?"

"Why, the count pretends to have understood that of the dryads," quickly retorted Madame.

"Undoubtedly," said the king, "but you know that the count has the weakness to wish to become a member of the academy; so that, to that end he has studied all sorts of things of which you, fortunately, are ignorant; and it might have happened that the language of this nymph of the waters was among the number of things which you have not studied."

"You will comprehend, sire, that under such circumstances one does not rely altogether upon one's own knowledge; the ear of a woman is not infallible, said Saint Augustin, and therefore I wished to consult other opinions than my own, and as my naiad, who, in her quality of goddess, is polyglot—that I believe is the term, M. de Saint Aignan?"

"Yes, madam," replied Saint-Aignan, quite disconcerted.

"And," continued the princess, "as my naiad who in her quality of goddess is polyglot, had in the first instance, spoken to me in English, I feared, as I told you, that I might not have heard rightly; and I sent for Mesdemoiselles de Montalais, de Ton-nay Charente and de la Vallière, begging my naiad to repeat in French to them that which she had before told me in English."

"And she did so?" asked the king.

"Oh! she is the most complaisant divinity in existence—yes, sire, she did repeat it. So that there cannot be a doubt upon the subject. Is it not so, young ladies," said the princess turning to the left wing of her army, "did not the naiad speak precisely in the terms I have related, and have I not in every way truly stated what she said Phyllis—I beg your pardon, I mistake—Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, is it not true?"

"Oh! absolutely, madam," replied Mademoiselle de Montalais, articulating every word in the most distinct manner.

"Is it true? Mademoiselle de Ton-nay Charente?"

"The pure truth," replied Athénais, in a less firm but still intelligible voice.

"And you, la Vallière?" demanded Madame.

The poor girl felt the king's ardent look was directed towards her; she did not dare deny, she did not dare speak falsely; she bowed her head in sign of acquiescence.

But she did not again raise her head, half frozen as she was by a coldness more painful than that of death.

This triple testimony crushed the king. As to Saint-Aignan he did not even attempt to conceal his despair, and without knowing what he said, he stammered out,

"An excellent joke! well played!—lady shepherdesses!"

"A just punishment for curiosity," said the king in a hoarse voice. "Oh! who will ever think, after the chastisement which Tyrsis and Amyntas have received, who will ever think of endeavoring to discover that which is passing in the hearts of shepherdesses? Certes, 'twill not be me; and you, gentlemen?"

"Nor me! nor me!" repeated all the courtiers.

Madame triumphed in this vexation of the king; she congratulated herself

upon it, thinking that the history she had told would alone end the matter.

As to Monsieur who had laughed at both the stories, without comprehending either, he turned towards Guiche.

"Why, count," he observed, "you say nothing—have you, then, nothing to say? Do you perchance pity Messrs. Tyrsis and Amyntas?"

"I pity them, with all my soul," replied Guiche, "for in truth love is so sweet a chimera, that to lose it, chimera though it may be, is losing more than life. Therefore, if the two shepherds believed that they were beloved, if they were happy in the idea, and instead of that happiness, they find not only a void equal to death itself, but a deception in love worse than a hundred thousand deaths, well then, I say, that Tyrsis and Amyntas are the two most unhappy men I know."

"And you are right, Monsieur de Guiche," said the king, "for, in fine, death is too severe a punishment for a little curiosity."

"That is to say then that my story of the naiad has displeased the king?" asked Madame, with affected ingenuousness.

"Oh! madam, undeceive yourself," said Louis, taking the hand of the princess, "your naiad has pleased me so much the more because she spoke the truth, and because her narrative has been supported by irrefragable testimony."

And these words fell on la Vallière with a look which no one, from Socrates down to Montaigne, could have perfectly defined.

This look and these words completely overwhelmed the unhappy girl, who leaning on de Montalais' shoulder, appeared to have lost all consciousness.

The king rose, without remarking this incident, to which, moreover, no one paid attention, and contrary to his custom, for he usually staid late, he took leave and returned to his own apartments.

Saint-Aignan followed him, in as much despair when he left the room as he was joyous on his entering it.

But Mademoiselle de Ton-nay Charente, less sensible to emotion than la Vallière, was not alarmed and did not faint.

And yet the last glance of Saint Aignan had been far otherwise majestic than the last look of the king.

CHAPTER LXIV.

ROYAL PSYCHOLOGY.

THE king returned to his apartments with rapid strides.

Perhaps Louis XIV. walked so quickly in order to avoid staggering. He left behind him the traces of mysterious mourning.

The cheerfulness which every one had remarked on his entering the drawing-room which every one had rejoiced at, no one had, perhaps, correctly fathomed or divined its real cause; but this stormy departure, that agitated countenance every one could understand, or at least believed that they could understand.

The levity of Madame, her pleasantry, which was somewhat free for a disposition easily offended, and above all the disposition of a king; the assimilation, doubtless too familiar of this king with men of ordinary stamp; such were the reasons which the company concluded had occasioned the precipitate and unexpected departure of the king.

Madame, more clear sighted in general, did not in the first instance see any thing more than this. It was enough for her to have inflicted some little torture on the self-love of him who so speedily forgetting contracted engagements appeared to have made it his study to disdain the conquest of the most noble and most illustrious heart.

It was not unimportant to Madame, in the position in which things then stood, to let the king feel the difference there was between loving one of exalted station, or in playing the lover like a country youth.

In these exalted amours, savoring of royalty and high power, having to a certain degree their etiquette and their ostentation, a king not only did not disparage his high dignity, but found in them tranquillity, security, mystery, and general respect.

By descending to vulgar amours he, on the contrary met, even from the most humble of his subjects, comments and sarcasm; he lost the prestige of infallibility, his character remained no longer inviolable. Having lowered himself by entering the regions of minor human miseries, he was exposed to their petty storms.

In a word, to abase the god-king to the state of a simple mortal by render-

ing his heart as vulnerable as that of the meanest of his subjects, was aiming a terrible blow at his exalted race. Louis was to be captivated more by his self-love than by love. Madame had wisely calculated her revenge, and as has been seen, she had revenged herself.

Let it not, however, be imagined that Madame was subject to the violent passions of the heroines of the middle ages, and that she saw things under a gloomy aspect. Madame, on the contrary, young, graceful, witty, coquettish, amorous rather from fancy, imagination, or ambition than from the heart, Madame, on the contrary, inaugurated that period of easy and transitory pleasures which signalized one half of the seventeenth century and three-fourths of the eighteenth.

Madame therefore saw, or thought she saw things under their true aspect; she knew that the king, her august brother-in-law, had been the first to laugh at the humble la Vallière, and that, according to his usual habit, it was not probable that he would ever adore a person at whom he had laughed, even for a moment.

Moreover, was not self-love there, that whispering demon, who plays so principal a part in the dramatic comedy called the life of woman? did not self-love proclaim aloud, in gentle murmurs, in almost inaudible whispers, in fact, in every possible key, that there was no comparison to be established between her, a princess, lovely, young, and rich, and poor la Vallière, who, it is true, was as young as herself, but less lovely and altogether fortuneless.

And this should not appear astonishing on the part of Madame. It is well known that the greatest characters are those who flatter themselves the most in the comparison they draw between themselves and others.

It may perhaps be asked, what was Madame's object in the attack which she so skilfully combined? why bring forward all her forces, if the only end was to dislodge the king from a heart of which he had calculated on taking possession? was it necessary for Madame to give so much importance to la Vallière if she did not fear la Vallière?

No, Madame did not fear la Vallière in the point of view in which an historian sees the future, or rather that which has already happened. Madame was neither a prophetess nor a Sibyl;

Madame could not more than any other read in the terrible and eventful book of fate, which has enregistered in its most secret pages the most serious events.

No, Madame purely and simply desired to punish the king for having made a mystery, and in a manner worthy only of a school-girl, of la Vallière's declaration; she wished clearly to prove to him that if he chose to use such offensive weapons, she, a woman of intellect, and of high birth, would certainly find in the arsenal of her imagination, defensive weapons capable of shielding her even from the attacks of a king.

And, moreover, she wished to prove to him that in this species of warfare a king ceases to be a king, or at all events that kings, when fighting for their own account, and as ordinary individuals, may see their crowns fall from their head at the very onset, and, in short, if he had expected to be adored, from the first moment, and at his sole aspect by all the ladies of his court, that this was a rash and insulting pretension as regarded certain ladies of higher rank than the rest, and that this lesson falling in the nick of time on this too elevated, too haughty royal head, would be most efficacious.

These were undoubtedly Madame's reflections with regard to the king.

Thus, it will be seen that she had worked upon the minds of her maids of honor, and had prepared the whole scene of the acknowledgment of their being aware of the presence of the king and Saint Aignan.

The king was stunned by it. Since he had escaped the leading strings of M. Mazarin, this was the first time he had been treated as a mere man.

Such severity on the part of subjects, would have furnished him with matter for resistance. Power becomes greater by contention.

But to attack women, to be attacked by them, to have been duped by little country girls, who had, as it would have seemed, been brought from Blois for that express purpose, was the acme of dishonor to a young king, full of the vanity inspired by his personal advantages and his royal power.

There was nothing to be done; nor reproaches, nor exile, nor sullenness, could avail him.

To appear sullen would be to admit that he had been hurt, like Hamlet, by an unbuttoned weapon, that of ridicule.

To appear sullen with women! what an humiliation! above all when these women could revenge themselves by laughing.

Oh! if, instead of leaving all the responsibility to women, some courtier had meddled in this intrigue, with what joy would Louis XIV. have seized on the opportunity of rendering the Bastille useful.

But there again the royal anger paused, repulsed by reason.

To have an army, prisons, power almost divine, and to place this power at the service of a miserable spite, would be unworthy not only of a king, but of a man.

The only alternative, therefore, left to him, was to digest the affront he had received in silence, and to clothe his features in their accustomed gentleness and urbanity.

The question was to treat Madame as a friend: and why not?"

Either Madame had instigated the event, or the event had happened without her instigation.

If she had been the instigator, it was extremely rash in her; but was it not, in fine, a natural part for her to play?

Who was it that had gone to her in the very heart of the honeymoon to speak to her in amorous language?

Who was it that retrenched behind royal omnipotence had said to that young woman: "Fear nothing! love the King of France; he is above all; and a gesture of his hand, armed with the royal sceptre, will protect you against all, even your own remorse."

Upon which that woman had obeyed the royal words, or had ceded to that corrupting voice; and now that she had made the moral sacrifice of her honor, she saw that sacrifice repaid by an infidelity so much the more humiliating, that it was caused by a woman inferior to her who had before believed that she was loved.

Thus, even had Madame been the instigator of this revenge, Madame would have been justified.

If, on the contrary, she had been merely passive in the matter, what cause had the king to be offended with her?

Ought she, or rather could she, have stopped the babbling of these country girls? Ought she, by an excess of mistaken zeal, to have repressed, at the risk of rendering it more envenomed, the impertinence of three young girls?

All these arguments were as many painful wounds to the pride of the

king; but when he passed in review all these vexations, Louis XIV. felt astonished, that is to say after he had dressed his wounds, that he should feel other gnawing, insupportable, and unaccountable pains.

And thus he did not dare acknowledge, even to himself, that these shooting, agonizing pains, had their seat in his heart.

And, indeed, it is absolutely necessary that the historian should acknowledge to the reader, as the king, after a time, acknowledged to himself, that he had allowed his heart to be enraptured by the ingenuous declaration of la Vallière. He had believed in purity of love, in love for the man himself, in love, stripped of all interested motive; and his soul, still younger and still more ingenuous than he had imagined it to be, had sprung forward to meet that other soul which had revealed itself to him by its aspirations.

The thing which is the least ordinary in the complicated history of love, is the double inoculation of love in two hearts; there is no more simultaneousness than there is equality: the one almost always loves before the other, as the one almost always ends by loving longer than the other.

Thus the electric current establishes itself in proportion with the intensity of the passion which it first ignited.

The greater the love Mademoiselle de la Vallière had testified, the greater was that experienced by the king.

And it was precisely this that astonished the king.

For it had been clearly demonstrated to him that no sympathetic current could have influenced his heart; since this avowal was not love; since this avowal was only an insult offered to the king and to the man; since, in fine—and the word seared like a red hot iron—since, in fine, it was all mere deception.

So that this little girl—to whom it might rigorously be denied that she possessed either beauty, rank or wit—so that this little girl selected by Madame herself on account of these deficiencies, had not only excited the king, but had also disdained the king—that is to say, a man, who, like the sultans of Asia, had only to seek with his eyes, extend his hand, and let fall the handkerchief.

And since the night before, he had thought of nothing but this little girl; he had dreamed only of her; since the

night before his imagination had delighted in adorning her image with charms she did not possess; he had, in short—he whose attention was so much demanded by public affairs, whom so many persons were awaiting—he had, since the night before, consecrated every minute, every pulsation of his heart, to that one object.

In reality this was too much or too little.

And the indignation of the king was so great that it made him forget every thing, and among others that Saint Aignan was with him. The indignation of the king found vent in the most violent imprecations.

It is true that Saint Aignan had squeezed himself into a corner, and from that corner awaited the passing by of the tempest.

His own disappointment appeared to him a miserable trifle in comparison with this royal anger.

He compared with his own little self-love the immense pride of the offended king, and knowing the hearts of kings in general, and of this powerful one in particular, he asked himself if the weight of this tremendous anger, directed hitherto only against vague space, would not in the end fall upon him, for the mere reason that others were guilty and he innocent.

And in fact the king suddenly arrested his hasty strides and fixing an angry look on Saint Aignan—

“And you, Saint Aignan?” cried he.

Saint Aignan made a gesture which signified “Well, sire!”

“Yes, you have been as foolish as myself, have you not?”

“Sire!” stammered Saint Aignan.

“You allowed yourself to be entrapped by this vulgar jest?”

“Sire!” said Saint Aignan, whose limbs trembled most violently, “women, you know, are imperfect creatures, created only for our evil. Therefore, to expect any thing good from them is to ask an impossibility.”

The king, who had much self-respect, and who had begun to exert over his passions that power which he maintained during his whole life, the king reflected that he was debasing himself by evincing so much passion for so trifling an object.

“No,” said he, eagerly, “you are mistaken, Saint Aignan, I am not angry; I cannot but admire that we have been dupea, with so much dexterity and audacity, by those two little

girls. I admire, above all, that as we might have obtained positive information on the subject, we have committed the folly of consulting only our own hearts."

"Oh! the heart, sire, the heart is a physical organ which we must reduce to its physical functions, but which we must deprive of all moral function. I must acknowledge that when I saw the heart of your majesty was so much preoccupied by that little girl—"

"Preoccupied—I—my heart preoccupied!—my mind, perhaps—but as to my heart, it was—"

Louis again perceived that in order to close one gap he was opening another.

"Moreover," said he, "I have no right to reprove that child in any way; I well knew that she loved another."

"The Viscount de Bragelonne—yes, I had informed your majesty."

"Undoubtedly, but you were not the first; the Count de la Fere had asked the hand of Mademoiselle de la Vallière for his son. Well! on his return from England they shall be married, since they love each other."

"In truth I recognize in this the generosity of your majesty."

"Hear me, Saint Aignan; believe me, we must not in future occupy ourselves with adventures of this nature."

"Yes, let us digest this affront," said the courtier, with resignation.

"Oh! that will be an easy matter," said the king, stifling a sigh.

"And in order to begin," said Saint Aignan, "I—"

"Well?"

"Well! I will make a good epigram on the trio. I will call it Naiads and Dryads; it will please Madame."

"Do so, Saint Aignan, do so," said the king. "You will recite your verses to me; they will divert me. But no matter—no matter, Saint Aignan," continued the king, like a man who breathes with difficulty, "the blow demands superhuman strength to be worthily sustained."

And as the king concluded these words, assuming an air of most angelic patience, one of the valets on service scratched at the door.

Saint Aignan drew on one side from respect.

"Come in," cried the king.

The valet half opened the door.

"What is it?" inquired Louis.

The valet showed a letter folded in a triangular form.

"For his majesty," said he.

"And from whom?"

"I do not know; it was delivered by one of the officers on service."

The king made a sign, the valet handed the letter to him.

The king approached the lights on the table, opened the note, read the signature, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Saint Aignan was too respectful to look, but without looking he both saw and heard.

He ran towards the king.

The king with a motion of the hand dismissed the valet.

"Oh! good heaven!" cried the king, while reading.

"Does your majesty feel indisposed?" exclaimed Saint Aignan, with outstretched arms.

"No, no, Saint Aignan! read!"

And he handed the note to him.

Saint Aignan's eyes were immediately directed to the signature.

"La Vallière!" exclaimed he, "oh! sire."

"Read! read!"

And Saint Aignan read the following:

"SIRE:—Pardon my importunity; pardon, above all, the want of formality which accompanies this letter. A note appears to be more urgent and more pressing than a despatch. I therefore take the liberty of addressing a note to your majesty.

"I have returned to my own room worn down with grief and fatigue, and I implore your majesty to grant me the favor of an audience in which I shall be able to state the truth to my king.

"Signed, LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE."

"Well?" inquired the king, taking the letter from Saint Aignan's hand, who was quite stunned by what he had read.

"Well!" repeated Saint Aignan.

"What think you of this?"

"I can hardly tell."

"But, in short?"

"Sire, the little one has heard the thunder rolling in the distance, and she has been afraid."

"Afraid of what?" nobly demanded Louis:

"Why, how can it be otherwise, sire, your majesty has a thousand reasons for being angry with the author, or the authors, of such a sorry jest, and your majesty's memory, unfavorably impressed, is an eternal threat."

"Saint Aignan I do not consider this as you do."

"The king must see more clearly than I can."

"Well then, in these lines I see grief, constraint, and now above all that I remember some peculiarities in the scene which took place this evening. In short—"

The king paused.

"In short—" reiterated Saint Aignan, "your majesty will grant the audience; that is to me quite clear."

"I will do better than that, Saint Aignan?"

"What will you do, sire?"

"Take your cloak."

"But, sire—"

"You know the rooms of Madame's maids of honor?"

"Assuredly."

"Do you know any means of getting into it?"

"Oh! as to that, no."

"But, surely, you must know some cue in that direction?"

"In truth your majesty is the source of all good ideas."

"You know some one?"

"Yes."

"Who is it that you know? Speak."

"I know a certain youth, who is on good terms with a certain young lady."

"Of honor?"

"Yes, of honor, sire."

"With Tonnay Charente?" asked the king, laughing.

"No, unfortunately, with Montalais."

"And his name?"

"Malicorne."

"Good—and you can depend on him?"

"I believe so, sire. He must have some key—and if he has one, as I have done him a service, he will lend it to me."

"Nothing can be better—then let us go at once."

"I am at your majesty's commands."

The king threw his own cloak on Saint Aignan's shoulders and asked him for his, and then both went into the vestibule.

CHAPTER LV.

THAT WHICH NEITHER DRYAD NOR NAIAD
HAD FORESEEN.

SAINT-AIGNAN stopped at the foot of the staircase which led to the *entre sol*

occupied by the maids of honor, and to Madame's apartments.

And by a valet who happened to be passing he sent for Malicorne, who was still in Monsieur's rooms.

In about ten minutes, Malicorne came with nose in air and peering through the darkness to ascertain who could have sent for him.

The king drew back and concealed himself in the darkest corner of the vestibule.

Saint Aignan on the contrary advanced.

But on hearing the first words pronounced by Saint Aignan expressing his desire, Malicorne at once appeared to object.

"Oh! oh!" cried he, "you request to be admitted into the apartments of the maids of honor? You will readily comprehend that I cannot take such a step, without knowing your object in desiring it."

"Unfortunately, M. Malicorne, it is impossible for me to give you any explanation, you must therefore confide in me as a friend who got you out of trouble yesterday, and who requests you to do the same for him to-day."

"But I, sir, told you what I desired, and that was not to sleep in the open air, and every honest man may entertain such a desire, while you on the contrary, you give me no clue."

"Believe me, my dear Monsieur Malicorne," persisted Saint Aignan, "that if I were permitted I would explain to you—"

"Then, my dear sir, it is impossible that I can allow you to go into Mademoiselle de Montalais' room."

"And why not?"

"You know that better than any one, since you caught me on a wall paying my court to Mademoiselle de Montalais. It would, you will allow, be rather too complaisant in me, who pay my addresses to Mademoiselle de Montalais to open the door of her room to you."

"And who tells you that it is on her account that I am asking you for the key?"

"Who is it for, then?"

"Why it appears to me she does not lodge there alone?"

"No undoubtedly, she lodges with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Precisely."

"Well, you have really no more business with Mademoiselle de la Vallière than with Mademoiselle de Montalais; and there are only two

persons to whom I would give this key: and that would be to M. de Bragelonne, if he requested me to give it to him; or to the king should he command it."

"Well then, give me that key, sir, I command you," said the king advancing from his dark corner, and opening his cloak, "Mademoiselle de Montalais will come downstairs to you while we go up to Mademoiselle de la Vallière; it is in fact with her only we wish to speak."

"The king!" exclaimed Malicorne, throwing himself at the king's feet.

"Yes, the king," said Louis, smiling, "the king who is as much pleased at your resistance as at your capitulation. Rise sir, and do us the service which we ask of you."

"Sire, I am at your orders," said Malicorne, going up stairs.

"Send Mademoiselle de Montalais down," said the king, "and say not a word to her of my visit."

"Malicorne bowed his obedience, and continued to ascend the staircase.

But the king, struck with a sudden thought, followed him, and so rapidly, that although Malicorne had got up more than halfway, the king reached the door almost at the same time with him.

He then saw through the half opened door, as he stood behind Malicorne, la Vallière, sitting dejectedly in an arm-chair, and on the other side of the room Montalais, standing before a large pier glass, in her dressing-gown, combing her hair, while talking with Malicorne.

The king abruptly pushed open the door and entered the room.

Montalais on hearing the noise gave a slight shriek, and on recognizing the king, slipped out of the room accompanied by Malicorne.

On seeing this la Vallière started up like a galvanized body, and fell back again into her arm-chair.

The king advanced slowly towards her.

"You requested an audience, mademoiselle," said he, "I am here and ready to listen to you—speak."

Saint Aignan, faithful to his part of deaf, dumb, and blind, had seated himself on a stool, which chance appeared to have placed there expressly for him in one corner of the door-way, concealed behind the tapestry which hung from the top of the door, with his back leaning against the wall; he could thus listen without being seen. Like a watch dog who guards his master with-

out inconveniencing him, he resigned himself to wait the issue of the interview.

La Vallière, struck with terror at the aspect of the irritated king, raised herself from her chair a second time, and remained in an humble and supplicating attitude.

"Sire," stammered she, "oh! pardon me!"

"And for what is it, mademoiselle, you wish me to pardon you?" asked Louis XIV.

"Sire, I have committed a great fault, more than a great fault, a great crime."

"You?"

"Sire, I have offended your majesty."

"Not in the least," replied Louis XIV.

"Sire, I entreat you do not retain towards me that fearful air of gravity which reveals the very legitimate anger of the king, for you feel that I have wilfully offended you."

"In the first place, mademoiselle, in what can you have offended me? I cannot discover it. Is it by the mere jest of a young girl? a very innocent jest? moreover, you have diverted yourself at the expense of a credulous young man. That is perfectly natural; any other woman in your place would have done the same."

"Oh! your majesty crushes me with those words."

"And why so?"

"Because had the jest originated with me, it would not have been an innocent one."

"But, mademoiselle," rejoined the king, "when you requested an audience was this all you intended to say to me?"

And the king stepped back one pace.

Then la Vallière, in a hurried and agitated voice, with eyes scalding from the effect of tears she had shed, advanced towards the king.

"Did your majesty hear all that was said?"

"All what?"

"All that was said by me under the royal oak."

"Not a single word escaped my ears, mademoiselle."

"And when your majesty did hear me, could you for a moment believe that I was abusing your credulity?"

"Yes, credulity; you have uttered the right word."

"And your majesty did not suspect that a poor girl like me may sometimes

be compelled to submit to the will of others."

"Your pardon; but I shall never understand how one who had expressed her will so freely under the royal oak could allow herself to be influenced to such a degree by the will of others."

"Oh! but threats, sire."

"Threats! who threatened you? who has dared to threaten you?"

"Those who have the right to do so, sire."

"I recognize in no one the right to threaten in my kingdom."

"Pardon, me sire, but there are persons near your majesty, and of sufficiently high rank to have, or rather to think they have the right to ruin a young girl who is fortuneless having nothing but her reputation."

"And how ruin her?"

"By causing her to lose that reputation by a disgraceful expulsion."

"Oh! mademoiselle," said the king, with profound bitterness, "I like people who exculpate themselves without incriminating others."

"Sire!"

"Yes, and it is painful to me, I acknowledge, to observe that a simple justification, such as yours might be, should be thus complicated by a tissue of reproaches and imputations."

"To which, then, you do not give credence?" exclaimed la Vallière.

The king remained silent.

"Oh! say so then at once," vehemently exclaimed la Vallière.

"I regret to be compelled to acknowledge it," replied the king, bowing coldly.

The young girl uttered a loud cry, and striking her hands against each bitterly exclaimed other.

"Thus, then, you do not believe me?"

The king made no reply.

The features of la Vallière became much agitated by this silence.

"Thus, you believe that I—I combined this ridiculous, this infamous plot to scoff at your majesty."

"Good heaven!" said the king, "why, it is neither ridiculous nor infamous; it is not even a plot, it is raillery, more or less agreeable, and that is all."

"Oh!" cried the young girl, despairingly, "the king does not believe me! the king will not believe me!"

"Why, no, I will not believe you."

"Great God! great God!"

"Hear me. What can in fact be

more natural," said the king, "the king follows me, watches me, the king perhaps wishes to amuse himself at my expense, let us amuse ourselves at his, and as the king is a man of feeling heart, let us assail him by his heart."

La Vallière concealed her face with her hands, stifling a sob.

The king continued, pitilessly; he was avenging himself upon the poor victim for all that he had himself suffered.

"Let us imagine, then," said he, "this fable: that I love the king, that I have distinguished him above all others; the king is at once so simple and so vain that he will believe me; after that we will relate this proof of the simplicity of the king, and we will laugh at it

"Oh!" cried la Vallière, "to think that of me is horrible."

"Oh!" rejoined the king, "that is not all. If this vain prince should view this jest as real earnest, if he should be so imprudent as publicly to testify something like joy at it, well then, before the whole court, the king shall be humiliated. Oh! it will be a delightful story to tell some day to my lover, a portion of the dowry I shall give my husband—this adventure of a king duped by a cunning young girl—"

"Sire!" cried la Vallière, wild with despair—distracted, "not one word more, I entreat, I supplicate. Do you not see, then, that you are killing me?"

"Oh! mere raillery," murmured the king, who began, however, to be somewhat moved.

La Vallière fell on her knees and that with so much violence that they resounded on the floor; then clasping her hands,

"Sire!" exclaimed she, "I prefer shame to treachery."

"What are you doing?" said the king, but without moving to raise her from the ground.

"Sire, when I shall have sacrificed to you my honor and my reason you will then perhaps believe my loyalty. The story which you heard in Madame's room, and related by Madame, is a falsehood; that which I said under the great oak—"

"Well?"

"That alone was the truth."

"Mademoiselle?" exclaimed the king.

"Sire!" cried la Vallière, urged on by the violence of her feelings, "sire!

were I to die of shame upon this spot, on which both my knees are now rooted, I would repeat to you with my last gasp, I said there that I loved you; well! I now say I love you."

"*Y es!*"

"I have loved you, sire, since the first day I saw you; since first your royal eyes beamed on me at Blois, revivifying and luminous. I love you, sire; it is I know high treason for a poor girl like me to love her king, and to tell him that she loves him. Punish me for this audacity, disdain me for this shamelessness, but never say, never believe that I have scoffed at you, that I have betrayed you. I am of a race faithful to royalty, sire; and never—never—my king—oh! I am dying!"

And suddenly, her strength, her voice, her breath, became exhausted; she fell, like the tender flower mentioned by Virgil, bent down by the scythe of the mower.

The king, on hearing these words, this vehement, heart rending supplication, no longer entertained a doubt; his whole heart expanded to the ardent breathings of that love, which spoke in such noble and courageous language.

But when he heard the impassioned account of her love, he covered his face with both hands.

And when he felt the hands of la Vallière clinging to both his, he raised her in his arms, and pressed her to his heart.

But she, half dying, dropped her head upon his shoulder; she had lost all consciousness.

The king, in great alarm, called for Saint Aignan.

Saint Aignan, who had carried his discretion so far as to remain motionless in his corner, feigning to wipe away a tear, ran in on being thus called by the king.

Then he assisted Louis in seating the young girl on a chair, clapping the palms of her hands, and throwing Hungarian water over her, repeating to her:

"Mademoiselle! come, mademoiselle! it is all over, the king believes you, the king forgives you! There, there, now, pray take care, the king is suffering too much from his emotion! His majesty is very sensitive. His majesty has a heart. Ah! the deuse! mademoiselle, be more considerate! the king is turning pale!"

And, in fact, the king was visibly very pale.

As to la Vallière she did not move.

"Mademoiselle! mademoiselle! now, really," continued Saint Aignan, "recover your senses, I beg of you, I entreat you, it is time now; think of one thing: should the king be really ill, I shall be compelled to call in a physician. Ah! what an extremity! good Heaven! mademoiselle! dear mademoiselle! come to yourself! make a good effort! quick! quick!"

It would have been difficult to display more persuasive eloquence than did Saint Aignan; but something more energetical and still more active than this eloquence at last restored la Vallière.

The king had knelt down before her, and was imprinting his burning kisses on the palms of her hands.

She at length recovered her senses, languishingly opened her eyes, and, with a dying look, murmured:

"Oh! sire! your majesty has then pardoned me?"

The king did not reply—his emotions overpowered him.

Saint Aignan withdrew to a corner of the room.

La Vallière rose.

"And now, sire," said she, firmly, "now that I have justified myself, at all events, I hope, in your majesty's opinion, permit me to retire to a convent. I will there pray for blessings on my king to the last moment of my life, and I shall die loving God, who has granted me one day of happiness."

"No, no," replied the king, "you shall live here, blessing God, on the contrary, but loving Louis, who will make your whole life a life of happiness"—Louis, who loves you—Louis, who swears to this!"

"Oh! sire! sire!—"

And on this hesitation on the part of la Vallière, the king's kisses were so earnestly repeated, that Saint Aignan thought it his duty to retreat outside the tapestry.

But these kisses, which she had not at first the strength to resist, at length alarmed the young girl.

"Oh! sire!" cried she, "do not cause me to repent having been so loyal, for it would be proving to me that your majesty still holds me in contempt."

"Mademoiselle," said the king, suddenly retiring, and with much respect, "I love and honor nothing in this world more than I do you; and no one at my court, I swear this before God,

shall be so much esteemed as you shall for the future; I ask your pardon, therefore, for my impetuosity; it has proceeded from my excessive love; but I can prove to you that I can still love you even more, by respecting you as much as you can desire."

Then kneeling before her and taking her hand—

"Will you, mademoiselle," said he, "will you do me the honor to permit me to kiss your hand."

And the king's lips slightly touched the trembling hand of the young girl.

"Henceforward," added Louis, rising up and looking affectionately at la Vallière, "henceforward you are under my protection. Speak not to any one of the wrong which I have done you in believing for a moment that you could be guilty; pardon in others the wrong they may have done you. In future you shall be so much above them, that, far from inspiring you with fear, you will not even feel pity towards them."

And he bowed religiously as if about to leave a temple.

Then calling Saint Aignan who approached with much humility.

"Count," said he, "I hope that mademoiselle will be pleased to accord to you a portion of her friendship in return for that which I have vowed to her for ever."

Saint Aignan bent his knee before la Vallière.

"What happiness will it confer on me," he murmured, "if mademoiselle will do me so much honor."

"I will send you back your companion," said the king. "Adieu, mademoiselle, or rather I should say, till we meet again; be pleased not to forget me in your prayers?"

"Oh! sire," said la Vallière, "of this you may be assured, God and you only occupy my heart."

These last words filled the soul of the king with gladness, he joyfully drew Saint Aignan out of the room with him.

Madame had not foreseen this conclusion; neither naiad nor dryad had said a word of it.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE NEW GENERAL OF THE JESUITS.

WHILE la Vallière and the king were blending in their first reciprocal avowal

all the sorrows of the past, all the happiness of the present, all the hopes of the future, Fouquet having returned home, that is to say, to the apartment which had been allotted to him in the palace, Fouquet was conversing with Aramis precisely on those matters which the king was at that moment neglecting.

"You will tell me," began Fouquet, after having installed his guest in a comfortable arm-chair, and seated himself by his side, "you will tell me, M. d'Herblay, what is our present position in the Belle-Isle affair, and whether you have lately received any news from that quarter?"

"My lord superintendent," replied Aramis, "every thing there is proceeding according to our desires; the expenses have been paid, not the slightest inkling of our designs has transpired."

"But the garrison which the king intended to place there?"

"I have this morning received intelligence that it arrived there fifteen days ago."

"And they have been treated?"—

"Marvellously well."

"But what has become of the former garrison?"

"It was landed at Sarzeau, and was immediately ordered to march to Quimper."

"And the new garrison?"

"Are by this time entirely devoted to us."

"You are quite sure of what you are saying, Monsieur de Vannes?"

"Perfectly so, and you shall hear how all this has been brought about."

"But of all garrisoned places you are aware that Belle-Isle is the most dull and disagreeable."

"I know that, and I act in consequence; there is but little space, no communication with other places, no women, no gambling, no amusements. Now in these days it is really a great pity," said Aramis with one of those smiles which were peculiarly his own, "to see how much young men seek to divert themselves, and consequently how very favorably they feel towards those who give them amusements and pay for them."

"But do they amuse themselves at Belle-Isle?"

"If they are amused at the king's expense they will like the king, but if the king causes them to lead a wearisome, annoying life, and they are

amused at M. Fouquet's expense, they will like M. Fouquet."

"And you have given previous instructions to my intendant, that immediately on their arrival—"

"No, by no means; they were allowed, during eight days, to annoy and weary themselves at their good pleasure; but these eight days passed, they began to learn that the officers of the former garrison had many more amusements than they had. On this it was remarked to them that the former officers had managed to make M. Fouquet their friend, and that M. Fouquet recognizing them as his friends, felt kindly enough towards them not to allow them to pass their time disagreeably, or to feel weary of remaining on his estates. This set them to reflect. But shortly afterwards the intendant told them that without prejudging the intentions of M. Fouquet, he knew enough of him to be convinced that he felt interested for every gentleman in the service of the king, and that he would, although he might not be acquainted with those newly arrived, do as much for them as he had done for the others."

"Admirably well! and thereupon the effects followed the promises, I hope? You know that it is my desire that no promises should ever be made in my name without being strictly fulfilled."

"Thereupon our two sailing vessels and your horses were placed at the disposal of the officers. The keys of the principal house were given to them, so that they had hunting-parties and riding-parties with the ladies they found at Belle-Isle, and all those they could manage to recruit in the neighborhood who did not fear sea-sickness."

"And there are a good number of such at Sarzeau and at Vannes—is it not so, your Grace?"

"Oh! along the whole coast," tranquilly replied Aramis.

"But now, as to the soldiers?"

"All, you will comprehend, is in due proportion. The soldiers have wine, excellent provisions and high pay."

"'Tis well; so that—?"

"So that we can rely upon this garrison, which is already better than the last."

"Good"

"The result of all this is that if God consents to these garrisons being changed every two months; in the

course of three years the whole army will have passed through Belle-Isle, and that instead of having one regiment devoted to us we shall have fifty thousand men."

"Yes, I knew full well that no other man but you, M. d'Herblay, could be so valuable, so priceless a friend. But in all this," he added, laughing, "we have forgotten our good friend du Vallon; what becomes of him? During the three days I passed at Saint Mandé I acknowledge that I had forgotten him entirely."

"Oh! I do not forget him," retorted Aramis. "Porthos is at Saint Mandé, well greased in every joint, well provided for as to his table, and well taken care of as to wine. I have allowed him to walk in the small park, a walk which you had reserved to yourself, and he now enjoys it. He begins to walk again, he exercises his strength in bending the young elm-trees, or in splitting the old oaks, as did Milo of Croton in times of yore, and, as there are no lions in the park, it is probable we shall find him sound and whole. Our Porthos is a valiant fellow."

"Yes, but in the mean time he will get weary of such solitude."

"Oh! never."

"He will be asking questions."

"He sees no one."

"But, in short, he is expecting or hoping something."

"I have given him a hope, which one of these mornings we will realize."

"And what is that?"

"That of being presented to the king."

"Oh! oh! and in what quality?"

"As engineer of Belle-Isle, to be sure."

"Ah! that is true."

"Will it be possible?"

"Undoubtedly. Will it not now be necessary that he should return to Belle-Isle?"

"Indispensable. I am even thinking of sending him back at the earliest possible moment. Porthos is a man of good presence; he is a man of whom d'Artagnan, Athos and myself alone know the weak points. Porthos never forgets himself, he is full of dignity; on the officers he will produce the effect of a Paladin of the times of the crusades; he will make the whole staff drunk, without being in the slightest degree affected himself, and he will be for every body an object of sympathy

and admiration. And then should it happen that we have an order that we wish executed, Porthos is a living watchword, and they would be compelled to act in conformity with his wishes."

"Well then, send him back."

"And that is my design, but in a few days, for I must tell you one thing."

"What is it?"

"It is that I mistrust d'Artagnan. He is not at Fontainebleau, as you may have observed, and d'Artagnan is never absent or at leisure, but with some intention. So that now my own affairs being concluded, I must ascertain what affairs they are that are occupying d'Artagnan."

"Your affairs are concluded, say you?"

"Yes."

"Then you are very fortunate, and wish that I were able to say as much."

"I hope that you no longer feel any anxiety?"

"Hum!"

"The king receives you marvellously well."

"Yes."

"And Colbert leaves you in peace?"

"Pretty much so."

"In that case," said Aramis, following up his ideas in his logical manner, "in that case we may think again of what I said to you yesterday with regard to that little girl."

"What little girl?"

"Have you already forgotten?"

"Yes."

"With regard to la Vallière."

"Ah! that is true."

"Is it repugnant to you then to gain over that girl?"

"For one only reason."

"What is that?"

"It is because the heart is interested elsewhere, and because I feel not the slightest inclination for that child."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Aramis, "the heart you say is occupied."

"Yes."

"The deuse! you ought to be careful of that."

"And why?"

"Because it would be terrible for such a man as you to allow his heart to lead him when he stands so much in need of his head."

"You are right, and therefore you have seen that at your first call I left every thing. But let us return to the

little one. What utility can you foresee in my paying attention to her?"

"It is this; the king, it is said, has a fancy for her, at least it is so believed."

"And you who know every thing, do you know it to be otherwise?"

"I know that the king has changed very suddenly. The day before yesterday the king was all fire with regard to Madame; that only a few days ago Monsieur complained of this flaming passion to the queen-mother; that there have been some conjugal bickerings, and some maternal scoldings."

"And how do you know all this?"

"I know besides—"

"Well."

"That in consequence of these bickerings, and these scoldings, the king paid no further attention, did not scarcely address a word or a look to her royal highness."

"And what then?"

"After this he paid attention to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is one of Madame's maids of honor. Do you know what is termed a *chaperon* in affairs of love?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well then, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is the chaperon of Madame. Take advantage of this position. You do not need it, but wounded self-love will render the conquest less difficult. The little one will be in possession of the king's and Madame's secret. You cannot imagine how much an intelligent man can do with such a secret."

"But how am I to approach her?"

"And do you ask me that?" cried Aramis.

"Assuredly: I shall not have time to pay attention to her."

"She is poor, she is humble; you will give her station. And whether she shall subjugate the king as his mistress, whether she approaches him only as his confidant, you will have gained to yourself a new adept."

"Tis well," said Fouquet. "What shall we do first with regard to this little girl?"

"When you have felt an inclination for any woman, how have you proceeded, M. Superintendent?"

"Why I wrote to her. I made my protestations of love. To these I added offers of service, and I signed—Fouquet."

"And none of them resisted?"

"One only. But four days ago she yielded as had done all the others."

"Will you take the trouble to write?" said Aramis to Fouquet, presenting him a pen.

Fouquet took it.

"Dictate," said he, "my head is so much occupied elsewhere that I could not compose two lines."

"Be it so," replied Aramis; "write."

And he dictated.

"Mademoiselle, I have seen you, and you will not be astonished that I should have thought you lovely. But you cannot, not having a position worthy of you, do otherwise than merely vegetate at court.

"The love of an honorable man, in the event of your being ambitious, might serve as an auxilliary to your wit and to your charms.

"I place my love at your feet; but as that love, however humble, and however discreet it may be, might compromise the object of its worship, it would be unbecoming a person of your great merit to risk being thus compromised without any result to her future prospects.

"If you deign to respond to my love, my love will prove its gratitude by making you for ever free and independent."

After having written this, Fouquet looked at Aramis.

"Sign," said the latter."

"Is that quite necessary?"

"Your signature at the bottom of that letter is worth a million; you forget that my dear superintendent."

Fouquet signed the letter.

"And now, by whom will you send it?" asked Aramis.

"Why by an excellent valet."

"One on whom you can rely?"

"He is my usual messenger."

"Very well."

"Moreover the stake we are playing in that quarter is not a very heavy one."

"How so?"

"If that which you say is true as to the complaisance of the little one for the king and Madame, the king will give her all the money she can want."

"The king has money then?" inquired Aramis.

"One must believe so, since he does not ask for any."

"Oh! he will ask for some, be assured."

"And more than that, I should have thought he would have spoken to me of that fête at Vaux."

"Well?"

"He did not say a word of it."

"He will speak of it."

"Oh! you think the king is very cruel, my dear d'Herblay?"

"Not the king."

"He is young, therefore he is good!"

"He is young, therefore is he weak, impassioned; and M. Colbert holds in his ugly hand his weakness or his passions."

"You see then that you do fear him?"

"I do not deny it."

"Then am I lost."

"How so?"

"I have no influence with the king, but that which money gave me."

"And what then?"

"And, I am ruined."

"No."

"Why say you, no? do you know my affairs better than I do?"

"Perhaps."

"And yet, supposing he were to ask to have this fête?"

"Well, you will give it."

"But the money?"

"Have you ever felt the want of it?"

"Oh! did you but know the price at which I procured the last sum."

"The next will cost you nothing."

"Who then will give it me?"

"I will."

"You will give me six millions?"

"Yes."

"You, six millions?"

"Ten, should it be necessary."

"In truth my dear d'Herblay," said Fouquet, "your confident assertions terrify me more than even the anger of the king. Who then are you?"

"It would appear to me that you know me."

"I was mistaken; then, what is it you would have?"

"I would have on the throne of France a king who should be devoted to M. Fouquet, and I would that M. Fouquet, should be devoted to me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fouquet, pressing his hand, "as to being yours, I am yours entirely! but, believe me, my dear d'Herblay you are laboring under a delusion."

"In what?"

"Never will the king be devoted to me."

"I did not, as it appears to me, tell you that the king would be devoted to you."

"Why, yes, you did, and only a moment since."

"I did not say the king. I said a king."

"Is not that one and the same thing?"

"On the contrary, 'tis altogether different."

"I do not understand."

"You will soon understand; suppose now that this king should be another man than Louis XIV."

"Another man?"

"Yes, one who would owe all to you."

"Impossible."

"Even his throne."

"Oh! you are mad. There is no other man than the king, Louis XIV. who can seat himself upon the throne of France. I cannot see one, not one."

"I can see one."

"Unless, indeed, it be Monsieur," said Fouquet, looking with much uneasiness at Aramis. "But Monsieur—"

"It is not Monsieur."

"But how would you that a prince who is not of the race; how would you that a prince who has not rights—"

"The king I mean, my king, or, rather, your king, shall, you may rest assured, be all he ought to be."

"Beware, beware, M. d'Herblay, you are giving me the ague, you are giving me a vertigo."

Aramis smiled.

"Your ague and your vertigo attack you most unnecessarily," replied he.

"Oh! I say once more you terrify me—"

Aramis again smiled.

"You laugh?" inquired Fouquet.

"And fear not, when the day shall come, I will explain myself; you are no more Saint Peter, than I am the Lord, and yet I will then say to you, 'Man of little faith, why doubtedst thou?'"

"Yes, by heaven! I doubt—I doubt because I do not see."

"It is then because you are blind; I will no longer, therefore, treat you as Saint Peter, but as Saint Paul, and I will say to you, 'The day will come when thy eyes shall be opened.'"

"Oh!" said Fouquet, "that I could but believe."

"You do not believe! you whom I have ten times led across the abyss in safety, in which, had you been alone you would have been engulfed; you do not believe, you, who from being merely the attorney-general rose to the

rank of intendant, from the rank of intendant to the rank of first minister, and who from the rank of first minister will pass to that of mayor of the palace. But, no," continued he with his eternal smile, "you cannot see and therefore you cannot believe."

And Aramis rose to take leave.

"A last word," said Fouquet, "you have never before thus spoken to me; you have never shown yourself so confident, or, I should say, so daring."

"Because, in order to speak loudly, the voice ought to be free."

"And yours is so?"

"Yes."

"Since a short time?"

"Since yesterday."

"Oh! beware, M. d'Herblay, you are pushing confidence even to audacity."

"Because a man may be audacious when he is powerful."

"You are powerful."

"I have offered you ten millions; I again offer them to you."

Fouquet rose much agitated.

"Tell me, now, tell me: you spoke of throwing down kings, and to replace them by other kings. God pardon me! but that is, if I am not mad, what you but just now said."

"You are not mad, and I did really say that just now."

"And wherefore said you so?"

"Because a man can speak of thrones thrown down, and kings created, when he is himself above all kings and thrones—of this world."

"Then you are all powerful!" exclaimed Fouquet.

"I have already said so, and I now repeat it," replied Aramis, with flashing eyes and quivering lips.

Fouquet threw himself into his arm-chair and covered his face with his hands.

Aramis gazed on him for a moment, as the angel of human fate might have looked upon a simple mortal.

"Adieu!" said he to him; "sleep tranquilly, and send your letter to la Vallière. To-morrow we shall meet again, shall we not?"

"Yes, to-morrow," said Fouquet, shaking his head, as does a man when recovering from a swoon, "but where, where shall we meet?"

"At the king's drive, if you will."

"Very well."

And they separated.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE STORM.

THE next day had dawned gloomy and bleak; and as every one knew that a drive formed part of the royal programme for that morning, every one immediately, on opening their eyes, looked anxiously upon the sky.

Above the trees was suspended a thick and heavy vapor, which had scarcely strength sufficient to raise itself thirty feet from the ground, and the sun's pale rays could be perceived but faintly through the thick veil of this dense cloud.

That morning there was no dew. The grass had remained dry, the flowers weak and drooping. The birds sang more reservedly than usual among the foliage—motionless, as if dead. The strange, confused, and life-like murmurs, which seem to be created by and exist but with the sun—those breathings of all nature, which speak incessantly amidst all other noises—were not to be heard: silence had never been more perfect.

This mournful appearance of the heavens struck the king immediately on rising and going to his window.

But, as orders had been given for the drive—as all the preparations had been made—as, and this was more important and a much more peremptory reason, Louis calculated on this drive in order to fulfil the promises of his imagination, and, we may even now admit, the yearnings of his heart; the king decided without hesitation, that the state of the heavens had nothing to do with the question; that the drive had been determined on, and whatever might be the weather the excursion should take place.

Moreover, there are in certain terrestrial reigns, favored by Heaven, hours when it might be thought that the will of terrestrial kings had its influence on divine will. Augustus had Virgil to tell him: *Nocte pluit tota, redeunt spectacula mane*; Louis XIV. had Boileau, who must have told him very different things, and Heaven, which appeared almost as complaisant to him as Jupiter had been to Augustus.

Louis heard mass, as was his custom, but, it must be acknowledged, was rather abstracted from the presence of the Creator by the remem-

brance of the creature. He employed himself during the service in calculating more than once the number of minutes, then of seconds, that would elapse before the thrice happy moment at which the promenade was to commence; that is to say, the moment at which Madame should set out from the palace with her maids of honor.

Moreover, it would be needless to say, that every one in the palace had remained ignorant of the interview, which had taken place the night before, between the king and la Vallière. Montalais, perhaps, from her love of gossiping, might have spread the report; but Montalais in this circumstance was forewarned by Malicorne, who had placed upon her lips the padlock of mutual interest.

As to Louis XIV. he was so happy, that he had pardoned, or almost pardoned, Madame her malicious trick of the previous evening. And, indeed, he had rather to congratulate himself upon it than to complain of it. But for this trick he would not have received the letter from la Vallière; without this there would have been no audience; and but for this audience he would still have been in suspense. His heart was so replete with felicity that malice could not find a corner there; at all events, at that moment.

Therefore, instead of frowning at his sister-in-law on meeting her, Louis promised himself to evince more friendship towards her, and to be even more gracious with her than usual.

This was, however, on one condition, and this condition was, that she should be exact to the hour appointed.

These were the things of which Louis was thinking during mass, and which, it must be said, caused him during the holy service to forget those duties which, in his quality of Most Christian king and eldest son of the church, he ought most strictly to have observed.

Louis returned to the palace, and as the drive had been ordered for twelve o'clock, and it was then only ten, he sat down with great earnestness to work with Colbert and Lyonne.

But after working for some time, he every now and then rose from the table and went to the window, as this window looked towards the pavilion inhabited by Madame; in doing this he perceived M. Fouquet in the court-yard surrounded by several courtiers who, since the favor shown him by the king

the night before, were more attentive to him than ever. Fouquet was coming, with an affable and most contented mien, to pay his devoirs to the king.

Instinctively, on seeing Fouquet, the king turned towards Colbert.

Colbert was smiling, and appeared overflowing with amiability and jubilation.

This joyous feeling had been communicated to him by the entrance of one of his secretaries, who had delivered to him a pocketbook which, without opening it, Colbert had dropped into his vast pocket.

But as there was always something sinister in the expression of Colbert's smile, Louis, of the two smiles, preferred that of Fouquet.

He made a sign to the superintendent to come upstairs, and then turning to Lyonne and Colbert,

"Finish what you are about, then lay it upon my desk, and I will read it at my leisure."

And he left the room.

Fouquet had hastened to obey the signal given by the king. As to Aramis, who was accompanying the superintendent, he had very gravely retreated into the centre of the group of vulgar courtiers, and had there disappeared without having been observed by the king.

The king and Fouquet met on the landing-place at the top of the stairs.

"Sire," said Fouquet, observing the gracious welcome the king seemed about to give him, "sire, for some days past your majesty overwhelms me with kindness. It is no longer a young king, it is a young god who reigns over France; the god of pleasure, happiness, and love."

The king blushed. Although flattering, the compliment was somewhat too direct.

The king led Fouquet into a small parlor which separated his cabinet from his bed-room.

"Do you know why I summoned you?" said the king, seating himself on the edge of a window, so that he might still observe what was doing in the gardens which surrounded the pavilion.

"No, sire; but I feel assured that it is for something pleasing if I may judge from your majesty's gracious smile."

"Ah! you prejudice?"

"No, sire, I observe, and I see."

"Then you deceive yourself."

"Who I, sire?"

"For on the contrary I called to you to quarrel with you."

"With me, sire?"

"Yes, and on a most serious subject."

"Your majesty really alarms me, and yet I await, full of confidence, in your justice and your kindness."

"What do I hear, M. Fouquet? I am told that you are preparing a great fête at Vaux."

Fouquet smiled, as does sometimes the victim when about to approach the fatal scaffold.

"And you do not invite me?" continued the king.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "I had not thought of such a fête, and it was only last night that one of my friends—" Fouquet emphasized this word—"was pleased to suggest it to me."

"But I saw you last night, and you did not speak of it to me, M. Fouquet."

"Sire, how could I hope that your majesty would thus descend from the high regions in which you live so low as to honor my residence with your royal presence?"

"An excuse, M. Fouquet, you did not speak to me of your fête."

"I did not speak to the king with regard to this fête in the first instance, because nothing was decided with regard to this fête, and also because I feared to be refused."

"And what could have made you fear a refusal, M. Fouquet? Take care, I am determined to drive you to the wall."

"Sire, the profound desire I had that the king would accept my invitation—"

"Well, M. Fouquet, there is nothing more easy, I perceive, than that we should understand each other. You have a desire to invite me to your fête—I have a desire to go there; invite me, and I will go."

"What! your majesty would deign to accept?" murmured the superintendent.

"In reality, sir," said the king, laughing, "I think I do more than to accept; I think that I invite myself."

"Your majesty overwhelms me with honor and happiness!" exclaimed Fouquet; "but I am compelled to repeat what M. de la Vieuville said to your grandfather, Henri IV., *Domine non sum dignus*."

"My answer to all this, M. Fouquet, is that if you give a fête, invited or uninvited I will go to your fête."

"Oh! thank. thanks, my king," said Fouquet, raising his head after receiving this signal favor, which mentally he knew would bring down ruin on him.

"But how has your majesty been informed?"

"By public rumor, M. Fouquet, which speaks marvels of you and your house. Will it make you proud, M. Fouquet, that the king should be jealous of you?"

"It would make me the happiest man of the whole world, sire; for from the day that the king should be jealous of Vaux I should have something worthy his acceptance, to offer to my king."

"Well, M. Fouquet, prepare your fête, and open wide your folding gates."

"And you, sire," said Fouquet, "be pleased to fix the day."

"One month from this day."

"Sire, has your majesty nothing more to desire?"

"Nothing, M. the Superintendent, excepting that I should, during that time, desire to see you near me as frequently as possible."

"Sire, I have the honor to be of your majesty's drive this morning."

"Tis well, I am indeed going out, M. Fouquet, and there are the ladies just going to the rendezvous."

The king, on saying these words, with all the ardor not only of a young man, but of a young man in love, retreated from the window, receiving his cane and gloves from the hands of a valet de chambre.

From the outside was heard the prancing of horses and the rolling of carriages upon the pavement of the court-yard.

The king descended the staircase; at the moment he appeared on the front steps every one stopped. The king walked straight to the young queen. As to the queen-mother, who was suffering more and more from the malady by which she had been attacked, she had determined on not going out.

Marie Therese got into her carriage with Madame, and asked the king in what direction he desired that they should drive.

The king, who had just seen la Vallière, still pale from the events of the previous evening, get into a carriage with three of her companions, answered the queen that he had no preference, and that he would be well pleased that she should make her choice.

The queen, nowever, left the choice to Madame, and the latter then ordered the outriders to proceed towards Apremont.

The outriders immediately took the lead.

The king, mounted on a horse, and for some minutes continued riding by the side of the queen's carriage.

The weather had somewhat cleared up; however, a sort of dusty veil obscured the sun, extending over the whole surface of the horizon.

The heat was positively suffocating.

But as the king did not appear to pay any attention to the state of the atmosphere, no one appeared to allow it to trouble them, and the drive, according to the order given by Madame, was continued towards Apremont.

The troop of courtiers was noisy and joyous; it was easy to perceive that every one endeavored to forget, and to cause others to forget, the unpleasant discussions of the previous evening.

Madame, above all, was charming.

And, in fact, Madame seeing the king at her carriage door, and as she did not suppose that it was on the queen's account that he remained there, she hoped that her prince had returned to her.

But after riding about a quarter of a league the king with a gracious smile bowed, turned his horse's head, allowing the carriage of the queen to go on, then that of the first ladies of honor, then all the others successively, who seeing that the king had stopped the persons they conveyed wished to stop also.

But the king made them a sign with his hand to proceed.

When la Vallière's carriage was passing the king approached it. The king bowed to the ladies, and was about to ride by the side of the carriage containing Madame's maids of honor, when the whole file suddenly stopped.

Doubtless, Madame, uneasy at the king having left her, had given the order to stop.

It will be recollected that the direction of the promenade had been given to her.

The king sent to inquire what was her object in stopping the carriages.

"To get out and walk," she replied.

She doubtless hoped that the king, who on horseback was following the carriage that contained the maids of honor, would not dare to follow the maids of honor when on foot.

They were in the centre of the forest.

The promenade promised to be very agreeable, beautiful above all, for dreamers and lovers.

Three long avenues, shady and undulating, met in the small circular opening where the carriages had halted.

These avenues covered with green moss, and shadowed by trees rich in foliage, had each their small horizon of one foot of sky, seen from beneath the arches formed by the entwining branches; such was the aspect of this locality.

Across these avenues could be seen passing and repassing with evident signs of alarm roebucks disturbed from their sylvan lairs, who after pausing for a moment in the middle of the road, and having raised their heads, fled with the swiftness of arrows returning by a single spring into the dense thickets, while here and there could be perceived a philosophic rabbit, sitting and scratching his nose with his fore feet, interrogating the air to ascertain whether all these people who were advancing, and who came thus to intrude upon his meditations, his repasts or his amours, were not followed by some crooked legged beagles, or had not beneath their doublets some murderous fowling-piece.

The whole company had alighted from their carriages, seeing the queen alight.

Marie Therese took the arm of one of her ladies of honor, and after a furtive glance directed to the king, who did not appear to perceive that he was in the slightest degree the object of the queen's attention, she went into the forest by the first pathway that she met with.

Two huntsmen walked before her majesty with canes which they used to raise the branches or remove the brambles which might impede her way.

On alighting, Madame found at her side M. de Guiche, who bowed to her, and placed himself under her orders.

Monsieur had been so much delighted with his bath that he declared that he preferred going to the river, he however gave Guiche permission to join the promenade and remained at the palace with the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp.

He no longer experienced the slightest shadow of jealousy.

It was in vain therefore that he had been sought for in the procession; but as Monsieur was a very egotistical

prince and in general contributed but little to the general amusement, his absence was rather a subject for congratulation than regret.

Every one had followed the example given by the queen and Madame, and amused themselves in their own way according to their tastes or as chance directed.

The king as we have said remained near la Vallière, and alighting from his horse at the moment the carriage door was opened, approached and offered her his hand.

Immediately Montalais and Tonnay Charente withdrew, the first from calculation the other from discretion.

Only there was this difference between them, that the one withdrew with the desire of being agreeable to the king, and the other with that of being disagreeable.

During the last half hour, the weather had also seemed to come to a determination, all that veil as if urged onward by the hot wind had formed a mass of clouds to the west, then being repulsed by an opposite current, advanced slowly and heavily towards the forest.

They all felt that a storm was approaching, but as the king did not remark it, no one thought he had the right to observe it.

The promenade was therefore continued; some few unquiet spirits, however, raised their eyes from time to time to the lowering sky; others still more timid, walked near their carriages, in which they calculated on sheltering themselves, should the storm come on.

But the greater part of the suite, seeing the king courageously entering the wood with la Vallière, followed the king. On seeing which the king taking la Vallière's hand drew her into a sidewalk, into which no one dared to follow him.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE RAIN.

At that moment, and in the same direction that the king and la Vallière had taken, only walking in the wood instead of taking the path, two men were sauntering along completely regardless of the state of the weather. They had not seen either Guiche or Madame, or the king or la Vallière.

Suddenly something passed in the

air like a volley of flame followed by a hollow and distant rumbling.

"Ah!" said one of the two, raising his head, "the storm is coming; let us get back to the carriages my dear d'Herblay."

Aramis raised his eyes to investigate the state of the weather.

"Oh!" replied he, "there is no need for haste."

Then taking up the conversation where it had no doubt been broken off,

"You say then that the letter which we wrote last night must by this time have reached its destination."

"I say that it has so, certainly."

"By whom did you send it?"

"By my usual messenger, as I before had the honor of telling you."

"Did he bring back the answer?"

"I have not seen him since. Doubtless the little one was on service in Madame's apartment, or was dressing herself in her own room. She may have kept him waiting. The time for setting out had arrived, and we came away. I cannot consequently know what has taken place about the letter."

"Did you see the king before we came away?"

"Yes."

"How did he seem disposed towards you?"

"Admirably well, or infamously ill, as he was either sincere or hypocritical."

"And the fête?"

"Is to take place in a month."

"He invited himself to it?"

"With a persistency in which I could recognize Colbert."

"Tis well."

"Has not the night dispelled your illusions?"

"Upon what subject?"

"On the assistance which you may afford me under these circumstances."

"No: I spent the night writing, and all the orders are given."

"Do not deceive yourself; this fête will cost several millions."

"I will give six; you, on your side, get together two or three in case of need."

"You are a miraculous man, my dear d'Herblay."

Aramis smiled.

"But," inquired Fouquet, with some remaining anxiety, "since you can thus command millions, how did it happen that only a few days ago you did not give from your own pocket the fifty thousand livres to Baisemeaux?"

"Because only a few days ago I was as poor as Job."

"And to-day?"

"And to-day I am richer than the king."

"Tis very well," rejoined Fouquet; "I have a good knowledge of mankind. I know that you are incapable of failing in your word to me. I will not attempt to drag your secret from you, therefore let us speak no more of it."

At that moment a hollow rumbling sound was heard, which was instantly followed by a tremendous clap of thunder.

"Oh! oh!" cried Fouquet, "did I not tell you so?"

"Come, then," said Aramis, "let us get back to the carriages."

"We shall not have time," replied Fouquet, "here comes the rain."

And, indeed, as if the sky had opened, a deluge of large drops pattered upon the summits of the forest trees.

"Oh!" said Aramis, "we have time to get to the carriages before the rain penetrates the foliage."

"It would be much better," said Fouquet, "to take shelter in some grotto."

"Yes, and where shall we find a grotto?" asked Aramis.

"I know one," replied Fouquet, smiling, "not ten paces from this place."

Then looking around him—

"Yes," added he, "I am right."

"How happy you are in having so retentive a memory," observed Aramis, smiling in his turn; "but do you not fear that your coachman, not seeing us return, and imagining we have taken some cross road, will follow the court carriages?"

"Oh!" said Fouquet, "there is not the slightest danger; wherever I leave my coachman with my carriage, be it where it may, the only thing that could make him budge from it would be an express order from the king—and even then I doubt if he would stir. Besides, it seems to me that we are not the only persons who have strayed so far. I hear footsteps, and the noise of voices."

And saying these words Fouquet turned round, and pushing aside with his cane the branch of a tree, which prevented his seeing the avenue, and Aramis at the same time looking through this aperture—

"A woman!" cried Aramis.

"And a man," said Fouquet.

"La Vallière!"

"The king!"

"Oh! oh!" said Aramis, smiling, "can the king also be acquainted with your cavern?"

"That would not at all astonish me for he appears to me to have established a tolerably regular communication with the nymphs of Fontainebleau."

"No matter," said Fouquet, "let us get into it as quickly as possible; should he not know it, we shall see what becomes of him: if he does know it, as it has two openings, when he enters by the one we will get out of it by the other."

"Is it far off?" asked Aramis, "for the rain is already dripping through the trees."

"Here it is."

Fouquet pushed aside a few branches and thus made his way to an excavation in a rock completely concealed by heather, ivy and thick underwood.

He pointed it out to Aramis, who followed him.

At the moment he was entering the grotto the latter turned round.

"Ho! ho!" said he, "they have come into the wood, and are advancing this way."

"Well, then, let us cede the place to them," said Fouquet, smiling and dragging Aramis by his cloak. "But I cannot believe that the king knows my grotto."

"In fact," said he, "they are looking about, but it seems to me that they are only seeking for some thickly foliaged tree, under which they can take shelter."

Aramis was not mistaken; the king was looking in the air and not around him.

He held la Vallière's arm within his, his hand was pressing hers. La Vallière began to slip on the damp grass.

Louis looked around him with still more attention, and perceiving an immense oak with thickly covered branches, he drew la Vallière under the shelter of the tree.

The poor child looked all around her; she appeared at once to fear and to desire that some one were following them.

The king made her lean against the trunk of the tree, whose vast circumference, protected by the thickness of its foliage, was as dry as if there had been no rain, although it was at that moment falling in torrents.

He was standing bare-headed before her.

In a few seconds some drops filtered through the branches of the tree and fell on the king's forehead, who did not appear to observe it.

"Oh! sire," murmured la Vallière, pushing the king's hat.

But the king bowed, obstinately refusing to put on his hat.

"Now is the time or never," whispered Fouquet to Aramis, "to offer the place to him."

"It is the time, or never, to listen and not to lose a word they are about to say to each other," replied Aramis in a low whisper to Fouquet.

And they both remained silent, so that the king's voice could reach the place where they stood.

"Oh! good heaven! I can see, or rather can divine your great anxiety. Believe me, I sincerely regret having thus isolated you from all the company, and to have thus brought you to a place where you will suffer from the rain. You are wet, and perhaps already feel cold."

"No, sire."

"And yet you tremble."

"Sire, it is from fear that my absence will be wrongly interpreted, and at the moment, certainly, when all the company will have re-assembled."

"I should willingly propose to you, mademoiselle, to return to the carriage, but look, listen, it would be impossible to attempt it at such a moment."

And indeed the thunder was rolling and the rain descending in perfect torrents.

"Moreover," continued the king, "it is impossible that any interpretation unfavorable to you can be conceived. Are you not with the king of France, that is to say, with the first gentleman of the kingdom?"

"Undoubtedly, sire," replied la Vallière, "and it is a great honor for me. Nor is it for myself that I fear these interpretations."

"For whom, then?"

"For you, sire."

"For me, mademoiselle?" said the king, smiling. "I do not understand you."

"Has your majesty then already forgotten all that passed last night in her royal highness' apartments?"

"Oh! let us forget that, I pray you; or let me only remember it to thank you for your letter, and—"

"Sire!" cried la Vallière, interrupting him, "the rain is now falling fast and your majesty remains uncovered."

"I beg, mademoiselle, that we may think only of yourself."

"Oh! as to me," said la Vallière, smiling, "I am a country girl, accustomed to run about in the meadows on the Loire, and in the gardens of Blois, in all weathers, and as to my clothes," added she, looking at her modest muslin gown, "your majesty sees that they do not incur much risk."

"In fact, mademoiselle, I have already often observed that you owe all to yourself and nothing to your toilet. You are not a coquette, and that in my eyes is a great merit."

"Sire, do not make me better than I really am; say only 'you cannot be a coquette.'"

"And why so?"

"Why," said la Vallière, smiling, "because I am not rich."

"Then you acknowledge that you like handsome things?" eagerly cried the king.

"Sire, I think those things handsome only which I can attain; all that is above my reach—"

"Is indifferent to you."

"Is useless to me, because it is forbidden."

"But, mademoiselle, I do not think that you are on the footing which you ought to be at my court. I have not been, undoubtedly, sufficiently well informed as to the services rendered by your family; the fortune of your house has been cruelly neglected by my uncle."

"Oh! by no means, sire. His royal highness monseigneur the late duke of Orleans, was always extremely kind to my stepfather M. de Saint Remy. His services were but humble and it may be said that we were paid according to our works. Every body has not the happiness of finding opportunities to render brilliant services to their king. I have no doubt that if opportunities had offered themselves my family would not have been backward in proving that their hearts were wholly devoted to their king, but we had not that good fortune."

"Well, mademoiselle, it is then the king's duty to correct this mischance, and I will joyfully undertake to remedy in your behalf and that immediately, this neglect of fortune."

"No, sire, no!" earnestly exclaimed

la Vallière, "he pleased to leave matters as they now are."

"What, mademoiselle! you refuse that which I ought and that which it is my will to do for you?"

"All was done for me that I desired, when I was allowed the honor of forming part of Madame's household."

"But if you refuse for yourself personally, accept at least for your relations?"

"Sire, your intention, generous as it is, dazzles and alarms me, for in doing for my house that which your goodness urges you to do, your majesty will create envy towards us, and enemies to yourself. Leave me, sire, in my mediocrity; leave to the feeling which I entertain, the delightful delicacy of disinterestedness."

"These sentiments are most admirable," cried the king.

"That is true," whispered Aramis to Fouquet, "and he cannot be accustomed to hearing such."

"But," said Fouquet, "should she give such an answer to my note?"

"Good!" said Aramis, "let us not prejudice but await the end."

"And besides, dear M. d'Herblay," added the superintendent, little inclined to believe all the fine sentiments just expressed by la Vallière, "it is often a skilful calculation to appear disinterested with kings."

"It is precisely what I was thinking at the moment," observed Aramis, "but let us listen."

The king drew near to la Vallière and as the water was trickling freely through the branches, he held his hat over the head of the young girl.

La Vallière raised her lovely blue eyes to this royal hat which was thus sheltering her and shook her head, sighing deeply.

"Oh! good heaven!" said the king, "what gloomy thought can thus invade your heart when I am forming a rampart for it with my own?"

"Sire, I will tell you. I had already ventured on this question, so difficult to be discussed by a young girl of my age, but your majesty compelled me to be silent. Sire, your majesty is married; any feeling which should estrange your majesty from the queen by inducing you to occupy your thoughts with me, would be a source of great grief to the queen."

The king endeavored to interrupt her, but she continued with an entreat ing gesture.

"The queen loves your majesty with a tenderness that can readily be understood; the queen follows your majesty with her eyes whenever you take a step to leave her, having had the happiness to meet with such a husband, she prays to heaven to keep possession of you, and she is jealous of every feeling of your heart."

The king again attempted to speak, but again la Vallière dared to prevent him.

"Would it not be a very culpable action," she pursued, "if seeing a tenderness at once so fervent and so noble, your majesty should give the queen the slightest cause for jealousy? Oh! forgive me that word, sire. Oh! great heaven! I know that it is impossible that the greatest queen of all this world could be jealous of a poor girl such as I am. But this queen is a woman, and like that of any other woman, her heart may open to suspicion, which wicked persons would take care to envenom. In the name of heaven, sire! think not of me, I am not worthy of it."

"Oh! mademoiselle," cried the king, "you do not then conceive that speaking as you do, the esteem I feel for you is heightened into admiration."

"Sire! you rate my words above their real value, you think me better than I am, you make me greater than God has made me. Be merciful then, sire, for did I not know that the king is the most generous man in his whole kingdom, I should think the king were jesting with me."

"Oh! certes, you can fear nothing of that nature; of that I am well assured," cried Louis.

"Sire I should be compelled to believe it should the king continue to address me in such language."

"I am then a most unhappy prince," said the king, in a sorrowful tone, in which there was no affectation, "the most unhappy prince in Christendom, since I cannot gain credence for my words from the person whom I love most in all the world, and who breaks my heart by refusing to believe my love."

"Oh! sire!" said la Vallière, gently pushing away the king, who had approached her nearer and nearer, "I believe the storm has passed over and, the rain is ceasing."

But at the very moment when the poor child, to escape the feelings of her own heart, too much in unison,

undoubtedly, with that of the king, the storm gave the most positive contradiction, for a blue flame illuminated the forest with a phantasmal light, and a clap of thunder, loud as a discharge of artillery, burst forth above the heads of the two youthful lovers, as if the height of the oak, beneath which they were standing, had attracted the forked lightning.

The young girl could not restrain a cry of terror.

The king with one hand pressed her to his heart, raising the other above her head, as if to shield her from the thunder.

There was a momentary silence, during which this charming group—charming as is every thing that is youthful and loving—remained motionless; while Fouquet and Aramis contemplated them, not less motionless than the king and la Vallière.

"Oh! sire! sire!" murmured la Vallière, "heard you that?"

And her head fell upon her shoulder.

"Yes," said the king, "you see that the storm is not yet over."

"Sire, 'tis a warning."

The king smiled.

"Sire, 'tis the voice of God, who threatens."

"Well," replied the king, "I will consider this clap of thunder as a warning, and even as a threat, if five minutes from this time it shall be renewed with equal violence; but, should this not happen, you will allow me to believe that a storm is a storm and nothing more."

And at the same moment the king raised his eyes as if to interrogate the heavens.

But, as if the sky had become the accomplice of Louis, during the five minutes' silence which followed the explosion that had so much alarmed the two lovers, no new explosion took place; and when the thunder was again heard it was very distant, and the storm itself appeared during these five minutes to have been put to flight, and to have traversed leagues in distance, borne away upon the wings of the contesting wind.

"Well, Louise," said the king softly, "will you again threaten me with celestial anger; and since you have desired to found a presentiment on the thunder, will you still doubt that it is not, at all events, a presentiment of misfortune?"

The young girl raised her head

during this time the rain was streaming through the leaves, and was trickling down the king's face.

"Oh! sire! sire!" cried she with an accent of irresistible alarm, which moved the king to the highest degree, "and it is for me," murmured she, "that the king remains thus uncovered and exposed to the rain: what am I, then?"

"You are," said the king, "the divinity that allays the tempest, the goddess who restores all nature to serenity."

At that moment a gleam of sunshine, penetrating through the trees, gave to each drop of the rain as it fell the brilliancy of the diamond."

"Sire," said la Vallière, almost overcome by the king's tenderness, but making a last effort to convince him, "sire, reflect once more on the anxieties to which your majesty will be subjected on my account. At this moment, gracious Heaven! they are seeking for you, they are calling for you. The queen must be uneasy, and Madame, oh! Madame!" exclaimed the young girl with an expression approaching terror.

This last name produced a certain effect upon the king; he started, and releasing la Vallière, whom till then he had clasped within his arms, went towards the avenue to look if any one were in sight, but returned almost instantly to la Vallière.

"Madame! did you say?" inquired the king.

"Yes, Madame; Madame, who is also jealous," replied la Vallière, in an agitated tone.

And her eyes, so timid, so chastely fugitive, dared for a moment to interrogate the king.

"But," said Louis, "Madame—Madame, it seems to me, has no right whatsoever—"

"Alas!" murmured la Vallière.

"Oh! mademoiselle!" cried the king, almost with an accent of reproach, "can you be one of those who think that a sister has the right of being jealous of a brother?"

"Sire, it befits me not to pry into the secrets of your majesty."

"Oh! you believe it with the rest," exclaimed the king.

"I believe that Madame is jealous, yes, sire," firmly replied la Vallière.

"Good heaven!" exclaimed the king, anxiously, "do you perceive it in her manner towards you? Has Madame

shown you ill will by any act of hers that you can attribute to this jealousy?"

"In no way, sire; I am so unimportant, I—"

"Oh! if it were so, indeed," cried Louis, with singular vehemence.

"Sire," said la Vallière, "they are coming; they are coming, I believe."

And forgetful of all etiquette, she seized the king's arm.

"Well mademoiselle," replied the king, "let them come. Who will dare to think ill of my having accompanied Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Oh! for pity's sake, sire; it will be thought strange that your hair should be thus wet, that you should have thus sacrificed yourself for me."

"I have only done my duty as a gentleman," replied Louis, "and wo to him who shall act contrary to this, by criticizing the conduct of his king."

And, in fact, at this moment were seen approaching in the avenue some few inquisitive faces, which appeared in search of some one, and having seen the king and la Vallière, seemed to have found what they were looking for.

They were persons sent by the queen and Madame, who took off their hats, as a sign that they had seen his majesty.

But Louis would not change his respectful and tender attitude towards la Vallière, notwithstanding her extreme confusion. Then when all the courtiers had assembled in the avenue, every one could observe the marks of deference and respect he had paid the young girl during the storm, by remaining standing and bare-headed before her. He at length offered her his arm, and led her towards the group that was waiting for him, replied with a nod to the bows that were made to him, and, still with his hat in his hand, conducted la Vallière to her carriage.

And as a slight shower, the last farewell of the storm which was disappearing, began to fall, the other ladies, whom respect had restrained from getting into their carriages before the return of the king, were exposed, not having even cloaks on, to this rain, from which the king guaranteed, as much as was in his power, the most humble among them all.

The queen and Madame could not but observe, as all the rest did, this exaggerated courtesy of the king.

Madame was so much annoyed at it, that she jogged the queen's elbow, saying to her—

"Look there ; only look,"

The queen closed her eyes as if seized with a vertigo. She put her hand to her face, and got into her carriage.

Madame got in after her.

The king again mounted his horse, and without paying particular attention to the occupants of either of the carriages, returned to Fontainebleau, his horse's reins hanging listlessly on his neck, while he was pensive and absorbed.

When the crowd had withdrawn, when they perceived that the sound of the horses' feet and the carriage wheels was nearly extinct ; when, in fine, they felt assured that no one would see them, Aramis and Fouquet ventured to leave their grotto.

Then they silently walked to the avenue.

Aramis looked carefully not only the whole distance his eyes could reach in the lengthened extent of avenue before and behind him, but also into the thickest parts of the wood.

"M. Fouquet," said he, when he felt well assured that no one could overhear them, "we must, at any cost, get back your letter to la Vallière."

"That will be a very easy matter," replied Fouquet, "if my messenger has not yet delivered it."

"Let come what may it must be done," rejoined Aramis, "there must be no impossibility in the case ; do you understand me ?"

"Yes, the king loves that girl, do you not think so ?"

"Yes ; but that is not the worst, for this girl, on her side, passionately loves the king."

"Which means to say that we must change our tactics, must we not ?"

"Without the slightest doubt : but you have no time to lose, and instead of thinking of becoming her lover, which is now impossible, you must declare yourself her most devoted friend and the most humble of her servants."

"This will I do, and it will be without repugnance, for this girl appears to me to be all heart."

"Or adroitness," added Aramis, "and the latter would be a more weighty reason still."

And he then added after a moment's silence—

"If I am not much deceived, this girl will be the great passion of the king's life. Let us get into the carriage, and then full speed to the palace."

CHAPTER LIX.

TODY.

Two hours after the carriage of the superintendent had been driven off by order of Aramis, carrying them both towards Fontainebleau with the rapidity of the clouds driven along the sky by the last breath of the storm, la Vallière was sitting in her own room in a plain muslin dressing gown, and was finishing her collation on a small marble table.

Suddenly the door opened and a valet de chambre announced to her that M. Fouquet was below and begged permission to pay his respects to her.

She made the valet repeat this twice ; the poor child only knew M. Fouquet by name, and could not in any way divine what possible relation there could be between her and the superintendent of finance.

However, after a moment, she reflected that as he might have been sent to her by the king, and after the conversation we have reported the thing was not altogether improbable, she gave a slight glance at her looking-glass, arranged her hair a little and desired the valet to admit him.

La Vallière however could not avoid feeling some degree of agitation. The visit of the superintendent was not an every day affair in the life of a lady attached to the court. Fouquet so celebrated for his generosity, his gallantry, and his delicacy towards women, had received more invitations than he had requested audiences.

In many houses the presence of the superintendent had been the precursor of fortune, with a good number it had signified love.

Fouquet entered la Vallière's room very respectfully, presenting himself with that grace which was the instinctive characteristic of the great men of that age, and which in these days is not understood, even from the portraits of that period in which painters attempted to perpetuate it.

La Vallière replied to the ceremonious bow of Fouquet by the courtesy of a school girl and presented him a chair.

But Fouquet bowed.

"I will not sit down, mademoiselle, until you have forgiven me."

"Forgiven you ! I—" cried la Vallière.

"Yes, you."

"And forgive what, good heaven !"

Fouquet fixed his most penetrating look upon the young girl, but could perceive only an expression of most unfeigned astonishment.

"I see, mademoiselle," said he, "that you have as much generosity as you have penetration, and I read in your eyes the forgiveness I solicited, but I forewarn you that the pardon of the lips will not suffice, I shall require the pardon of both heart and mind."

"I swear to you, upon my word, sir, that I do not understand you."

"This delicacy charms me still more," replied Fouquet, "and I see that you do not wish that I should have to blush before you."

"Blush! blush, before me!—but, come now tell me, of what then would you blush?"

"Can I be mistaken," said Fouquet, "and can I be happy enough to ascertain that the steps I have taken have not offended you?"

La Vallière shrugged her shoulders.

"Decidedly, sir," she replied, "you are speaking in enigmas, and I am too ignorant, it would appear, to understand you."

"Be it so," said Fouquet, "I will not insist, but only assure me that I may rely on your full and entire pardon?"

"Sir," said la Vallière with some degree of impatience, "I can only make you one answer, and I trust that it will satisfy you; if I knew of what wrong you had been guilty towards me I would pardon you, and with greater reason do I so, being ignorant of that wrong."

Fouquet pursed up his lips as Aramis would have done.

"Then," said he, "I may hope that notwithstanding all that has happened, a good understanding will exist between us, and you will do me the favor to believe in my respectful friendship."

La Vallière believed that she began to understand him.

"Oh!" said she, to herself, "I should not have believed M. Fouquet so eager to seek the source of a so new born favor."

Then aloud.

"Your friendship, sir," said she, "you offer me your friendship? But, in truth, the honor is altogether mine, it overwhelms me."

"I know, mademoiselle, that the favor of the master is more brilliant than that of the servant, but I can assure you that the latter is as devoted,

altogether as faithful and absolutely disinterested."

La Vallière bowed; there was in reality much conviction and real devotedness in the tone of the superintendent.

And therefore she held out her hand to him, "I believe you," she said.

Fouquet eagerly seized the hand which the young girl had offered him.

"Then," cried he, "you see no difficulty in returning to me that unfortunate letter?"

"What letter?" asked la Vallière.

Fouquet looked inquiringly at her, as he had before done, and with all the power of his eyes.

The same ingenuousness of countenance, the same candid expression.

"Well, mademoiselle," cried he, "after such a denial I cannot but acknowledge that your system is the most delicate that could possibly be imagined, and I should not consider myself an honest man could I doubt a woman so generous as yourself."

"In truth, Monsieur Fouquet," replied la Vallière, "it is with the most profound regret that I am compelled to repeat that I understand absolutely nothing of that you have said to me."

"But, in short, upon your honor, mademoiselle, you have not received any letter from me?"

"Upon my honor I have not," firmly replied la Vallière.

"Tis well! that is sufficient, made moiselle; permit me to renew the assurance of my entire esteem and respect."

Then bowing, he withdrew to return to Aramis, who was waiting for him in his apartments, and leaving la Vallière asking herself whether the superintendent had become insane.

"Well!" cried Aramis, who was waiting impatiently for Fouquet, "are you satisfied with the favorite?"

"Enchanted," replied Fouquet; "she is a woman of great mind and excellent heart."

"She was not angry?"

"Far from that; she would not even have the appearance of understanding me."

"Of understanding what?"

"Of understanding that I had written to her."

"And yet she must have concluded by understanding you sufficiently to return you the letter, for I presume that she did return it to you?"

"By no means."

"But then you clearly convinced yourself that she had burnt it."

"My dear Monsieur d'Herblay, for the last hour I have been playing at cross questions, and I have really had enough of the game, amusing as it may be. Therefore, understand me fully, the little one feigned not to understand me; she even denied having received any letter from me; therefore, having positively denied the receipt of one, she could not either return it to me or burn it."

"Oh! oh!" cried Aramis, with much anxiety, "what is this you are telling me?"

"I tell you that she swore to me by all the gods, that she had not received such a letter."

"Oh! that is too much; and you did not insist?"

"On the contrary, I insisted, and so far as to be impertinent."

"And she persisted in her denial?"

"Most positively."

"And she did not belie herself in any way?"

"Not in the slightest degree."

"Why, then, my dear friend, you have left your letter still in her possession?"

"It was, by heaven! absolutely necessary."

"Oh! that is a great error."

"And what the deuce would you have done in my place?"

"Undoubtedly you could not force her to return it, but such a letter ought not to remain against us."

"Oh! that young girl is generous."

"Had she been so, really, she would have returned your letter to you."

"I tell you she has a generous soul; I consulted her eyes, and in such matters I have some experience."

"Then you think she spoke sincerely?"

"Oh! with all my heart."

"Well, then, I believe that we are mistaken."

"How so?"

"I believe that, in reality, and as she told you, she has not received the letter."

"What mean you, not received the letter?"

"No."

"Do you suppose—"

"I suppose, that from some cause of which we are ignorant, your man did not deliver the letter."

Fouquet struck upon a bell.

A valet appeared.

"Send Toby to me," said he.

A moment afterwards a man came in; his eyes were restless, his mouth had a cunning expression, his arms were somewhat short, his shoulders rather high.

Aramis fixed his piercing eyes upon him.

"Will you allow me to interrogate him?" asked Aramis.

"Do so," said Fouquet.

Aramis was about to question the lackey, but he paused.

"No," whispered he, "he will see that we attach a great importance to this matter; question him yourself—I will pretend to be writing."

And Aramis seated himself at a table, turning his back to the servant, but observing him narrowly in a looking-glass which hung over the chimney-piece.

"Come here, Toby," said Fouquet.

The lackey advanced with a tolerably firm step.

"How did you execute my commission?" inquired Fouquet.

"Why, in the usual way, sir," replied the man.

"But tell me how?"

"I slipped into Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room, who was gone to attend mass, and I placed the note upon her dressing-table. Was not this the way you told me?"

"Oh! yes, and is that all?"

"Absolutely all, my lord."

"There was no one there?"

"No one."

"Did you then conceal yourself, as I had directed you?"

"Yes."

"And did she return?"

"About ten minutes afterwards."

"And no one could have taken the letter in the mean time?"

"No one; for no one went into the room."

"From without; but from the interior of the house?"

"From the place in which I had concealed myself, I could see every thing that happened in the room."

"Hark ye!" said Fouquet, looking intently at the servant, "should this letter have missed its destination, acknowledge it at once; for should any accident have happened to the letter your head shall answer for it."

Toby shuddered, but instantly recovered himself.

"My lord," said he, "I placed the letter on the table, as I told you; and

I only ask half an hour to prove to you that it is now in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hands, or to bring the letter back to you."

Aramis was minutely examining the expression of the lackey's countenance.

Fouquet was of a confiding disposition; the man had served him faithfully during twenty years.

"Go," said he, "'tis well! but bring me the proof you promise."

The lackey left the room.

"Well! what think you of all this?" said Fouquet to Aramis.

"I think we must, by some means or other, assure ourselves of the truth. I think that the letter has or has not reached la Vallière; that, in the first case, la Vallière must return it to you, or satisfy you by burning it before your eyes; in the second, that we must get back the letter even should it cost us a million. Tell me, is not that your opinion also?"

"Yes, my dear bishop, but I think also that you exaggerate the danger."

"Blind! blind that you are!" murmured Aramis.

"La Vallière, whom we are considering as a politician of the first order, is only a coquette, who hopes that I will pay my court to her, because I have already done so; and who now, having received a confirmation as to the king's love for her, hopes to have me in leading strings by virtue of this letter. All this is natural."

Aramis shook his head.

"That is not your opinion, it seems?" inquired Fouquet.

"She is not a coquette," said he.

"Allow me to tell you—"

"Oh! I am well experienced as to coquettish women," observed Aramis.

"My friend, my friend!"

"You would say that it is a long time since I studied these matters," cried Aramis. Oh! women change not their nature."

"Yes, but men change, and you are more suspicious now than you were formerly."

Then laughing heartily—

"Come now," continued he, "let us suppose that la Vallière shall give me one-third of her love and the other two-thirds to the king, would you consider the conditions as acceptable?"

Aramis rose impatiently.

"La Vallière has never loved, nor will ever love any but the king," cried he.

"But, in short," said Fouquet, "what would you do?"

"Rather ask me what I would have done."

"Well then, what would you have done?"

"First of all, I would not have allowed that man to go out."

"Who, Toby?"

"Yes, Toby! he is a traitor!"

"Oh!"

"I am certain of it. I would not have allowed him to leave the room until he had acknowledged the truth."

"It is still time."

"And how so?"

"Let us call him back; and question him in your turn."

"Be it so."

"But I can assure you that it is altogether useless. He has been with me twenty years, and has never committed the slightest blunder. And yet," added Fouquet, laughing, "it might very well have happened."

"At all events call him back again. This morning, it appears to me, I saw that face in deep conference with Colbert's people."

"And where was this?"

"Opposite the stables."

"Pooh! all my servants are at daggers drawn with those of that miserable pendant."

"I saw him, I tell you; and his face which, when he came into the room, ought to have been unknown to me, struck me disagreeably."

"And why did you not tell me this when he was here?"

"Because it is only at this moment that the recollection has clearly presented itself to me."

"Oh! oh! now you are alarming me," said Fouquet.

And he again struck his bell.

The valet de chambre came in.

"Toby," said Fouquet, "send Toby here."

The valet de chambre closed the door again.

"You give me carte blanche, then," said Aramis.

"Completely."

"I may use any means I please to come at the whole truth?"

"All means."

"Even intimidation?"

"I make you attorney-general in my stead."

They waited ten minutes, but uselessly.

Fouquet, becoming impatient, again struck his bell.

"Toby," cried he.

"Why, monseigneur," replied the valet, "they are seeking for him."

"He cannot be far; I did not give him any message."

"I will inquire, my lord."

And the valet de chambre again closed the door.

Aramis, during this time, was walking up and down the room, impatiently but silently.

They waited ten minutes more.

Fouquet rang with sufficient violence to have awakened a whole metropolis.

The valet de chambre came in trembling sufficiently to warn them that his intelligence was unfavorable.

"My lord is mistaken," said he, even before Fouquet had questioned him.

"My lord must have charged Toby with some commission, for he went straight to the stables, took the swiftest of my lord's horses, and saddled it himself."

"Well?"

"And he galloped off."

"Gone!" cried Fouquet, "let him be pursued and brought back."

"Gently! gently!" cried Aramis, taking Fouquet's hand, "tranquillize yourself, the evil is now done."

"The evil is done?"

"Undoubtedly; I was sure of it. And now let us not awaken suspicion; let us calculate the result of this blow, and let us parry it if we can."

"After all," said Fouquet, "the evil is not so great."

"Do you conceive so?" inquired Aramis.

"Undoubtedly; a man has surely the right to send a love-letter to a woman?"

"A man, yes; but a subject, no; above all when that woman is precisely the one whom the king loves."

"But, my friend, the king did not love la Vallière a week ago; he did not love her even yesterday, and the letter was written yesterday. I could not guess at the king's love when the king's love did not yet exist."

"Be it so!" said Aramis: "but unfortunately the letter was not dated, and it is that which torments me above all. Ah! had it only been dated yesterday, I should not have even the shadow of uneasiness on your account."

Fouquet shrugged his shoulders.

"Am I then in tutelage?" cried Fouquet, "is the king then king of my mind and body?"

"You are right," replied Aramis;

"let us not, therefore, give to things a greater importance than is due to them; and, moreover, should we be threatened, we have the means of defending ourselves."

"Oh! threatened!" said Fouquet. "you do not rank this ant's sting among the threats which can compromise my honor or my life, do you?"

"Reflect, Monsieur Fouquet, the sting of an ant may kill a giant, should that sting be venomous."

"But that all powerfulness of which you spoke, tell me, has it already evaporated?"

"I am all powerful, be it so," replied Aramis; "but I am not immortal."

"Come, now, our most pressing object is to get hold of Toby—is not that your opinion?"

"Oh! as to that, you will never again see him," replied Aramis, "and if he was such a treasure to you you may go into mourning for him, and that at once."

"But, in fine, he must be somewhere in this world."

"You are right; leave him to me," replied Aramis.

CHAPTER LX.

MADAME'S FOUR CHANCES.

ANNE OF AUSTRIA had sent to the young queen to request her to pay her a visit.

For some time, suffering from illness and falling from the high degree of beauty, from the height of youth, with that rapidity of decline which always accompanies the decadency of women who have had much to contend with in early life, Anne of Austria had the misfortune to perceive that to her physical sufferings had been added the pain of no longer being considered but as a living recollection among the young beauties, the young minds, and the young important personages of the court.

The warnings of her physician, those of her looking-glass, afflicted her much less than those inexorable warnings of the society of courtiers, who, similar to the rats on board a vessel, abandon the hold which the water is about to invade, in consequence of the decay arising from old age.

Anne of Austria was but little satisfied as to the hours which her eldest son devoted to her.

The king, her son, with more of affection than affection, had, at first, visited his mother for an hour every morning, and an hour every evening, but since he had taken upon himself the direction of the affairs of state, the morning and evening visits had been reduced to half an hour; then, by degrees the morning visit had been altogether discontinued.

They saw each other at mass; the evening visit had even been replaced by an interview either when the king had an assembly, or in Madame's apartments, where the queen-mother went with tolerably good will from consideration to her two sons.

From this resulted that immense ascendancy which Madame had gained, and which made her house the real point of royal reunion.

Anne of Austria felt this.

Finding herself suffering from great bodily pain and condemned by her sufferings frequently to avoid society, she was much grieved at foreseeing that the greater portion of her days, her evenings, would be spent in useless and despairing solitude.

It was with terror she recalled to mind the state of isolation in which the Cardinal de Richelieu had placed her, fatal and insupportable evenings during which however she had to console her, youth and beauty, which always are accompanied by hope.

She therefore formed the project of transporting the court into her own apartments, and to attract Madame together with all her brilliant escort to an abode already gloomy where the widow of a King of France, the mother of a King of France was reduced to console for her anticipated widowhood, the always weeping wife of a King of France.

Anne meditated.

She had intrigued much during her life. In her palmy days, when her young head was teeming with happy projects, she had near her, to stimulate her ambition and her love, a friend more ardent, more ambitious than herself, a friend who had loved her, a rare thing at court, and whom considerations of a trivial nature had separated from her.

But during so many years with the exception of Madame de Motteville and of Molena, the Spanish nurse, her confidant in her quality of compatriot and woman, who could flatter themselves

with having given a word of good advice to the queen?

Who also, among all those young and brilliant courtiers, could recall the past to her in the remembrance of which consisted her whole life?

Anne of Austria remembered Madame de Chevreuse, exiled in the first place more from her own free will than that of the king, and had then died in exile, the wife of an obscure gentleman.

She asked herself what Madame de Chevreuse would have counselled her in former times and under similar circumstances, and after serious meditation, it appeared to her that this artful woman, full of experience and sagacity answered her in her ironical tone:

"All these petty young people are poor and greedy. They need gold and incomes to enable them to pursue their pleasures; therefore, gain them over by gratifying their cupidity."

Anne of Austria adopted this plan.

Her purse was well filled; she had the disposal of a large sum amassed for her by Mazarin and lodged in a secure place.

She had the finest jewels in all France, and above all, pearls of such a size, that they made the young king sigh when he saw them, because the pearls in his royal crown were but as grains of millet in comparison with them.

Anne of Austria had no longer either beauty or charms at her disposal. But she was rich and laid out as a bait for those who would go to visit her, either golden crowns to be won at play, or handsome donations skilfully bestowed on days of particular good humor; or good windfalls of income which she would drag from the king by her solicitations, and all this she had determined on doing to maintain her credit and her influence.

And first of all she tried this scheme upon Madame, to gain over whom was the most important of all.

Madame, notwithstanding her intrepid confidence in her own wit and youth, ran headlong into the snare which had been extended for her. Enriched by degrees by these gifts, by cessions that were made to her, she felt much delight in these anticipated inheritances.

Anne of Austria employed the same means with Monsieur and with the king himself.

She instituted lotteries, to be drawn at her evening parties.

On the day which our history has now reached, there was to be a *medianoche* in the queen-mother's apartments, during which Anne of Austria was to put in lottery a pair of bracelets richly set in diamonds and of exquisite workmanship.

The medallions were antique cameos of the greatest value; as to their price, the diamonds did not represent a very considerable sum, but the originality, the beauty of the workmanship, were such that every one belonging to the court, desired that the queen not only should possess them, but to see those bracelets on the queen's arms; as on the days she wore them, it would be a favor to be admitted to admire them while kissing her hands.

The courtiers had even rung changes of great gallantry establishing this aphorism, that the bracelets would have been altogether priceless, if they had not had the misfortune to be placed in contrast with such arms as those lovely of the queen.

This compliment had the honor of being translated into every European language. More than a thousand odes, epigrams and sonnets, in Latin and in French, had been written and circulated on the subject.

The day on which Anne of Austria had decided on having the lottery was the decisive moment; for two days the king had not been to visit his mother.

Madame was still in high dudgeon after the grand scene of the naiads.

The king was no longer in ill-humor, but his mind was too powerfully occupied to allow him to attend to the petty storms or the trifling pleasures of the court.

Anne of Austria effected a diversion by announcing her famous lottery for the following evening.

It was for this purpose that she sent for, as we have before stated, the young queen, whom she had requested to pay her a morning visit.

"Daughter," said she to her, "I have good news to announce to you; the king has said the most tender things of you. The king is young and easily led away, but as long as you keep near me he will not dare to absent himself from you, to whom, moreover, he is attached by a most tender affection. This evening I am to have a lottery and you will come to it."

"I have been told," said the queen, in a timid tone of reproach, "that your majesty intends giving your beautiful

bracelets as the prize in this lottery, which are of such great rarity that they ought never to be separated from the crown-jewels, were it only for the reason that they have belonged to you."

"My dear daughter," then said Anne of Austria, who could discern the whole thought of the young queen, and wished to console her for not having offered these bracelets as a present to her, "it was necessary that I should induce Madame to visit me constantly."

"Madame!" cried the young queen, coloring deeply.

"Undoubtedly; would you not think it better to have a rival near you, where you could watch and overawe her, than to know that the king was constantly at her own house, courting her and being courted by her? This lottery is the attraction I employ to prevent this; do you blame me for it?"

"Oh! no," cried Marie Therese, clapping her hands with the childishness of Spanish satisfaction.

"And you no longer regret, my dear daughter, that I have not given you these bracelets, as was at first my intention?"

"Oh! no, oh! no, my good mother."

"Well, then; my dear daughter, put on your best looks, your handsomest attire, and let our *medianoche* be perfectly brilliant; the gayer you will be the more charming will you appear, and you will eclipse every woman by your splendor as by your rank."

Marie Therese left the room in a transport of delight.

An hour afterwards Anne of Austria received a visit from Madame, and covering her with kisses—

"Good news!" said she, "the king is delighted with my lottery."

"As to myself," said Madame, "I am not so delighted with it; to see such beautiful bracelets as those on the arms of any other woman but you, my queen, or myself, is a thing to which I could never accustom myself."

"Come, now, come, now," cried Anne of Austria, concealing beneath a smile a violent pain which she at that moment felt, "be not so violent, young lady—and do not at the first blush see things in the worst light."

"Ah! madam, fortune is blind, and as I am told, there are to be two hundred tickets."

"Just that number; but you also know that there is only one of them can win."

"Undoubtedly; and to whom will that fall? Can you tell me that?" cried Madame in despair.

"You have made me remember that I had a dream last night. Ah! my dreams mostly come true—I sleep so little."

"What did you dream, then?—but you seem to be in pain."

"No," said the queen, checking with admirable firmness an expression of anguish she would have uttered, caused by a new shooting pain in her chest. "I dreamt that the king had won the bracelets."

"The king?"

"You are going to ask me what the king could do with the bracelets, are you not?"

"That is true."

"And you would also say that it would be very fortunate were the king to win them, for having the bracelets he would be obliged to give them to some one."

"To return them to you, for example."

"In which case I should immediately give them away, for you do not think," added the queen-mother, laughing, "that I put these bracelets up to lottery from want of money. It is that I may give them away without exciting jealousy, but should chance not favor me, well, I must take care to direct chance. I know very well to whom I would give the bracelets."

These words were accompanied by so expressive a smile that Madame repaid it by a grateful courtesy.

"But," added Anne of Austria, "do you not know, as well as I do, that the king would not return the bracelets to me were he to win them?"

"He would give them to the queen, then."

"No, from the same reason that he would not return them to me, seeing that if I had wished to give them to the queen I needed not his intervention in the matter."

Madame cast a glance upon the bracelets which were sparkling in their case, placed on a neighboring side table.

"How beautiful they are," said she, sighing, "and are we not forgetting that your majesty's dream was, after all, but a dream?"

"It would greatly astonish me," replied Anne of Austria, "were my dream to deceive me; that has rarely happened to me."

"Then you might be a prophet."

"I have told you, my daughter, that I very rarely dream; but this dream coincides so perfectly, in so extraordinary a manner with my ideas, it tallies so completely with my combinations—"

"What combinations?"

"This one, for instance, that you should win the bracelets."

"In that case it would not be the king."

"Oh!" said Anne of Austria, "there is no such great distance between his majesty's heart and yours, you who are his beloved sister: there is, I say, no such great distance as to conceive that the dream will prove false. Only consider the good chances you will have just count them."

"I am counting them."

"First of all, that of the dream. If the king gains, it is certain that he will give you the bracelets."

"I admit that as one."

"If you, yourself, should win them, you would have them."

"Naturally; that is also admissible."

"And then, should Monsieur win them?"

"Oh!" cried Madame, laughing very heartily, "he would give them to the Chevalier de Lorraine."

Anne of Austria laughed, as did her daughter-in-law, that is to say, so heartily that her pain returned, and made her turn lividly pale in the midst of her hilarity.

"What is the matter?" cried Madame, much terrified.

"Nothing, nothing, only a stitch in my side. I laughed too violently. We had got to the fourth chance."

"Oh! as to that one, I cannot imagine it."

"Pardon me; but I have retained a number for myself, and should I win, you may be sure of me."

"Thanks! thanks!" exclaimed Madame.

"I hope you think yourself tolerably favored, and that the dream begins to assume the solid forms of a reality."

"In truth, you give me hope and confidence," said Madame, "and the bracelets thus gained will be a hundred times more precious to me."

"Well, farewell till this evening."

"Till this evening."

And Madame returned to her own apartment.

Anne of Austria, after her daughter-in-law had left her, said to herself while examining the bracelets—

"They are, indeed, very valuable, for by them this evening I shall conciliate a heart, and at the same time have obtained possession of a secret."

Then turning towards her solitary alcove—

"Would you have played it in this way, my poor Chevreuse," said she, as if addressing the shadow of her friend. "Yes, would you not?"

And as the perfume of other times, all her youth, all her wild imaginings, all her former happiness passed in review before her as the echo of that invocation.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE LOTTERY.

In the evening, at about eight o'clock, the whole court was assembled in the apartments of the queen-mother.

Anne of Austria, attired in grand costume of ceremony, exhibiting still some remains of beauty, enhanced by all the resources which coquetry could place in skilful hands, concealed from, or at all events endeavored to conceal from the crowd of young courtiers who surrounded her, and who still admired her, thanks to the combinations we have spoken of in the preceding chapter, the already visible ravages of that painful malady to which she was destined to succumb some few years later.

Madame, almost as much a coquette as Anne of Austria, the queen, simple and unaffected as she ever was, were seated on either side of her, contending for her kind attentions.

The ladies of honor united as an army in order to resist with concentrated strength, and consequently with greater chance of success, the malicious attacks of the young lords, lent each other, as does a battalion formed in squares, the mutual succor of a watchful guard, and of a good retort.

Montalais well skilled in this war of sharp-shooters, protected the whole line by the rolling fire which she directed against the enemy.

Saint Aignan, in despair at the rigor of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente, which was insolent from its inveterate obstinacy, would fain have turned his back upon her, but vanquished by the irresistible brilliancy of the lovely girl's large eyes, he every moment returned to consecrate his defeat by new sub-

missions, which Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente did not fail to repel by new impertinencies.

Saint Aignan knew not to what saint to pray.

La Vallière had not a court, but a commencement of one, for several courtiers pressed around her.

Saint Aignan hoping by this manœuvre to attract the eyes of Athénais towards him, had gone up to the young girl and bowed to her with a respect, which in the minds of some superficially informed persons was deemed to be a mere feint on his part and that he wished to play off Louise against Athénais.

But these persons had neither witnessed nor heard of the storm scene; and as the majority were informed and well informed too, her declared favor had attracted towards her the most adroit as well as the most stupid of the courtiers.

The former because they said as Montaigne did, "What know I,"

The others because they said as Rabelais did, "Perhaps."

The greater number had followed them, as in a hunt we see four or five staunch old staghounds following the real scent of the game, while all the rest of the pack follow only the scent of the leading hounds.

Madame and the queens examined the dresses of their ladies and maids of honor as well as those of the other ladies, and they deigned to forget that they were queens in order to remember that they were women.

That is to say that they pitilessly pulled to pieces all that wore a petticoat, as Molière would have said.

The eyes of the two princesses simultaneously fell on la Vallière, who, as we have said, was at that moment surrounded by many persons.

Madame was altogether pitiless.

"In good truth," said she, leaning towards the queen-mother, "if fortune were just it would favor that poor la Vallière."

"That is not possible," replied the queen-mother, smiling.

"And how so?"

"There are only two hundred tickets, so that it was impossible that every one should be upon the list."

"And she is not upon it?"

"No."

"What a pity! She might have won them and then sold them."

"Sold them?" exclaimed the queen.

"Yes; and that would have been a marriage portion for her and she would not be compelled to marry without a trousseau,* as will very probably be the case.

"Why! do you really think so?" cried the queen-mother, "poor little thing! is she so ill provided with dresses."

She pronounced these words as a woman who never had conceived the slightest notion of mediocrity.

"God pardon me! but I believe she wears the same dress to-night which she had on this morning during the promenade, and which remained unsoiled thanks to the care which the king took to protect her from the rain."

At the very moment that Madame was uttering these words the king entered.

The queen-mother and Madame would not perhaps have perceived his entrance, so fully occupied were they with slander, but Madame suddenly saw la Vallière who was sitting opposite the gallery, become confused and say some few words to the courtiers who surrounded her; the latter immediately drew back.* This movement caused Madame to turn her eyes towards the door. At this moment the captain of guards announced the king.

On hearing this announcement la Vallière whose eyes until then had been constantly fixed upon the gallery, suddenly cast them down.

The king came into the drawing-room.

He was dressed with tasteful magnificence and was conversing with Monsieur and the Duke de Roquelaure, the latter was on his left hand, Monsieur on the right.

The king first advanced to the queen, whom he saluted with graceful respect, he took his mother's hand and kissed it, addressed a few compliments to Madame on the elegance of her toilette, and then began his tour through the company.

La Vallière received the same attention, but neither more nor less than the other ladies. Then his majesty returned to his mother and his wife.

When the courtiers perceived that the king had only addressed a commonplace observation to the young girl towards whom he had been so particular in his attentions in the morning, they

immediately drew a conclusion from this apparent coldness. This conclusion was that the king had had a caprice, but that the caprice had already evaporated.

However, there was one thing they ought to have remarked, which was, that among the number of courtiers standing near la Vallière was M. Fouquet, whose respectful politeness was a support to the young girl, amid the various emotions by which she was visibly agitated.

M. Fouquet was preparing to converse more at length with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, when M. Colbert approached; and, after having made his bow to Fouquet, with all the forms of the most respectful politeness, he appeared decided on establishing himself close by the side of la Vallière, and began to converse with her.

Fouquet immediately ceded his place. All these manoeuvres were eagerly devoured by the eyes of Montalais and Malicorne, who exchanged their observations by significant glances.

Guiche, posted in the recess of a window, saw but Madame; but as Madame, on her side, frequently fixed her eyes on la Vallière, de Guiche followed their direction, and also frequently gazed at the young girl.

La Vallière instinctively felt the weight of all these inquisitorial glances bearing upon her, some expressing interest for her, others envious feelings. She had not been able to compensate this state of suffering either by obtaining a friendly word from her companions or a look from the king.

And therefore it would be impossible to express the suffering the poor girl endured.

The queen-mother then ordered the small table to be brought forward, on which were the lottery tickets, and begged Madame de Motterville to read the list of the elect.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the list was drawn up in conformity with the laws of etiquette. The king was the first upon it, then the queen-mother, then the queen, then Monsieur, then Madame, and the rest according to their rank.

All hearts palpitated during the reading of the list: there were at least three hundred persons invited by the queen-mother; they all asked themselves the question whether their names would appear among the number of the privileged two hundred.

* A trousseau is composed of the wedding garments of the bride, together with the stock of clothes of all descriptions, repared for her previous to her marriage—TRANS.

The king was listening with as much attention as the rest.

The last name having been read, he found that la Vallière's had not been included in the list.

Every one else might also have observed this omission.

The king colored as he did always when annoyed at any thing.

La Vallière, mild and resigned, did not appear in any way moved by it.

During the whole time occupied by the reading of the list the king had constantly fixed his eyes upon her. The young girl's heart dilated under the happy influence of this beaming look, too joyful and too pure to allow any other thought than that of love to penetrate her mind or heart.

Repaying by the duration of his attention this touching self-denial, the king clearly demonstrated to her he loved that he fully comprehended its extent and delicacy.

The list being concluded, all the countenances of the women who had been omitted or forgotten showed strong symptoms of vexation and disappointment.

Malicorne was also forgotten in the list of men, and his grimace said clearly to Montalais, who had also been omitted,

"Shall we not so manage matters with Fortune that she shall not forget us?"

"Oh! undoubtedly we will," replied the intelligent smile of Mademoiselle Aure.

The tickets were distributed to all according to their numbers.

Then Anne of Austria opened a Spanish leather bag, in which were two hundred numbers, engraved on balls of mother of pearl, and presented the open bag to the youngest of her maids of honor, desiring her to draw one ball.

The suspense occasioned by all these preparations, which were slow and dilatory, was rather that of cupidity than curiosity.

Saint Aignan bent down and whispered in the ear of Mademoiselle de Tonnyay Charente:

"As we have each a number, mademoiselle, let us unite our two chances. To you, the bracelet, if I win it; to me, should you gain it, a single look from your fine eyes."

"No, by no means, said Athénais; 'to you, the bracelet, should you win it; let each stand their own chance.'"

"You are altogether pitiless," cried Saint Aignan; "and I will punish you by a quatrain."

"Cruel are you, fair Iris,
To all my heart desires!"

"Silence!" cried Athénais, "you will prevent me from hearing the fortunate number."

"Number one!" cried the young girl who had drawn the ball from the leathern bag.

"The king!" exclaimed the queen-mother.

"The king has won it!" cried the young queen joyfully.

"Oh! the king! your dream!" whispered Madame, with great delight, into the ear of the queen-mother.

The king alone evinced no sort of satisfaction.

He only thanked Fortune for what she had done for him, by addressing a slight bow to the young girl who had been selected as the representative of the blind goddess.

Then receiving from the hands of Anne of Austria, amid the envying murmurs of the whole company, the case containing the bracelets,

"These bracelets, then, are really so beautiful?" said he.

"Look at them," said Anne of Austria, "and judge of them yourself."

The king opened the casket.

"Yes," said he, "and these are in fact most beautiful cameos. What exquisite finish!"

"What exquisite finish!" repeated Madame.

The queen, Marie Therese, easily perceived, and at the first glance, that the king would not offer her the bracelets, but as he did not seem to think in the slightest degree of offering them to Madame either, she felt satisfied, or nearly so.

The king sat down.

The most intimate of the courtiers pressed forward successively to admire by closer inspection the marvellous bracelets, and almost immediately, by the king's permission, they were passed from hand to hand.

And all of them, whether connoisseurs or not, uttered exclamations of surprise, and overwhelmed the king with their congratulations.

There was in fact something for all of them to admire; the brilliants for some, the beautiful carvings for others.

The ladies openly manifested their

disappointment on seeing such a treasure monopolized by the gentlemen.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" cried the king, whom nothing escaped, "one would really think that you wore bracelets as did the Sabines. Pray pass them on to the ladies, allow them to see them also, for they appear to me to have, and with good right, the pretension of understanding these matters better than you do."

These words appeared to Madame to be the commencement of a determination which she was awaiting.

She was encouraged, moreover, in this thrice happy belief by the eyes of the queen-mother.

The courtier who held the casket at the moment the king made this observation, amid the general agitation hastened to place the bracelet in the hands of Marie Therese, who knowing well, poor woman, that they were not destined for her, scarcely looked at them, and immediately passed them on to Madame.

The latter, and more particularly still, Monsieur, looked longingly and for a considerable time at the bracelet.

Then she passed the jewels to the ladies who were nearest to her, pronouncing but this word, but with an accent more expressive than a long phrase:

"Magnificent!"

The ladies who had received the bracelets from the hands of Madame, took the time they thought necessary to examine them and then sent them round by passing them to their right.

During this time the king was tranquilly conversing with Guiche and Fouquet.

It may be said that he let them speak rather than that he was listening to them.

Accustomed to certain forms of expression, his ears, like those of all men who exercise over others an incontestable superiority, caught only at those words scattered here and there in a conversation which required an answer.

As to his attention it was elsewhere.

It wandered with his eyes.

Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente was the last lady inscribed upon the list for tickets, and as if she had taken rank according to her inscription on the list—the only ladies who after her had not seen the bracelets were Montalais and la Vallière.

When they reached the two last, no

one appeared to pay any further attention to them.

The humbleness of the persons who were then handling these jewels took from them all their importance.

But this did not prevent Montalais from thrilling with joy, envy and cupidity at the sight of those beautiful stones, more than at the magnificent workmanship.

It is evident that had she been compelled to take her choice between the pecuniary value and the artistical beauty of the bracelets, Montalais would unhesitatingly have preferred the diamonds to the cameos.

And therefore was it with great difficulty she could prevail upon herself to pass them on to her companion, la Vallière.

La Vallière looked at them almost with indifference.

"Oh! how rich these bracelets are, how magnificent!" exclaimed Montalais; "and you do not seem enchanted with them, Louise! Why, really, you are not a woman!"

"Oh! yes, I am," replied the young girl, in a sweetly melancholy tone; "but why should we desire that which can never belong to us?"

The king, his head bent forward, had been listening to the young girl's answer.

The vibration of that voice had scarcely struck his ear than he rose up, his face beaming with delight, and traversed the whole circle in going from his place to la Vallière.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "you are mistaken; you are a woman, and every woman has a right to women's ornaments."

"Oh! sire," said la Vallière, "your majesty will then not positively believe in my humility?"

"I believe that you possess every virtue, mademoiselle, and candor with the rest; I therefore adjure you candidly to state what you think of those bracelets."

"That they are so beautiful, sire, they can be offered only to a queen."

"I am delighted to find that such is your opinion, mademoiselle; the bracelets are yours, the king begs you to accept them."

And as la Vallière, with a movement that almost resembled terror, eagerly held forth the casket to the king that he should take it from her, the king gently with his hand put back the trembling hand of la Vallière.

A silence of astonishment, more appalling than the silence of death, reigned throughout the assembly, and yet, where the queen sat, no one had heard what the king had said, nor understood what he had done.

A charitable friend took care to spread the news.

It was Tonnay Charente, to whom Madame had made a sign to approach her.

"Ah! good heaven!" cried Tonnay Charente. "is not that la Vallière fortunate? The king has just given her the bracelets!"

Madame bit her lips with such violence that the blood appeared on the surface of the skin.

The young queen looked alternatively at Madame and la Vallière, and laughed.

Anne of Austria leaned her chin on her beautiful white hand, and remained long absorbed by a suspicion which preyed upon her mind and by an agonizing pain which preyed upon her heart.

Guiche, on seeing Madame turn pale, and guessing at the cause of this sudden paleness, rushed precipitately from the assembly and disappeared.

Malicorne then contrived to step near to Montalais, and, favored by the general confusion and murmuring voices—

"Aure," said he, "you have there beside you our fortune and our fate."

"Yes," replied the latter.

And she tenderly embraced la Vallière, whom in her heart she was tempted to strangle.

CHAPTER LXII.

MALAGA

DURING this long and violent contention of court ambition against heart-felt love, one of the personages of our history, the one who, perhaps, ought to have been the least neglected, was neglected, but little thought of, and unhappy.

In fact d'Artagnan, for we must call him by his name, in order to remember that he had at once existed, d'Artagnan had nothing whatever to do in this brilliant and frivolous crowd. After having followed the king during two whole days at Fontainebleau, having observed all the pastoral wanderings

and the heroi-comical metamorphoses of his sovereign, the mousquetaire had felt that such a life did not at all coincide with his views.

Being accosted at every turn by people who would address him in such terms as these—

"How do you find this dress suits me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

He would reply in his placid but jeering tone—

"Why really, sire, I think you as well dressed as the handsomest monkey at the fair of Saint Lawrence."

This was a compliment such as d'Artagnan paid when it did not suit him to pay any other, and pleased or not they were compelled to be content with it.

And when any one asked him—

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, how do you intend to dress yourself this evening?"

He replied—

"I shall undress myself."

And this made even the ladies laugh. But after having spent two days in this way, the mousquetaire seeing there was nothing serious beneath all this, and that the king had completely forgotten or appeared to have forgotten Paris, Saint Mandé, and Belle-Isle;

That M. Colbert dreamed only of colored lamps and fireworks;

That the ladies had a whole month before them of tender glances to give and to receive,

D'Artagnan asked the king for leave of absence on account of family affairs.

At the moment that d'Artagnan made this request, the king was getting into bed completely exhausted from having danced.

"You wish to leave me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" asked he, with an astonished air.

Louis XIV could never comprehend how any one could separate from him, when they could enjoy the signal honor of being near his person.

"Sire," said d'Artagnan, "I leave you because I can be of no use to you here. Ah! if, indeed, I could hold the balance pole for you while you are dancing, it would be quite another affair."

"But, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," gravely replied the king, "we dance without a balance pole."

"Ah! really," continued the mousquetaire, with imperceptible irony, "well now I did not know that."

"Have you not seen me dance then?" asked the king.

"Oh! yes; but I believed that it

would go on further and further still. I have been mistaken, and that is another reason for my withdrawing. Sire, I regret it, but you have no more use for me here; besides, should your majesty require my services, you always know where to find me."

"'Tis well," said the king.

And he granted the leave of absence.

We shall not therefore seek for d'Artagnan at Fontainebleau, it would be useless trouble; but with the permission of our readers we will find him once more at the Golden Pestle, in the rue des Lombards, the abode of our venerable friend Planchet.

It is eight o'clock in the evening; the weather is sultry. There is but one window open; it is that of a room in the *entre-sol*.

A perfume of spices mixed with a perfume less exotic, but more penetrating, that of the mud in the streets, ascends to the nostrils of the mousquetaire.

D'Artagnan, lying in an immense chair, with a flat back, his legs not stretched out, but lying over a stool, forms the most obtuse angle that can be well imagined.

His arms are crossed above his head, his head leaning on his left shoulder, like Alexander the Great.

Those eyes which were usually so piercing and so restless, are fixed, although almost closed, on a small corner of the blue sky of which he caught this glimpse between two chimneys. There was just blue enough to make a patch of sufficient size to mend one of the bags of beans or lentils which formed the principal furniture of the shop on the ground floor.

Thus stretched out, thus stupefied in his vague gazings, d'Artagnan is no longer a warlike man, d'Artagnan is no longer an officer of the palace; he is a mere citizen, listlessly lounging between dinner and supper, or between supper and bed time; one of those worldly men whose brains are ossified, and who have not space enough in them for a single idea.

We have said that it was getting dark; the shops were beginning to light up, while the windows in the upper stories were being closed. From below could be heard the measured footsteps of a patrol of soldiers, going its rounds.

D'Artagnan continued hearing nothing, seeing nothing but his small patch of blue sky.

About two paces from him, and com-

pletely in the dark, was Planchet, lying at full length upon a sack of indian corn, his chin resting on his arms, and looking with great anxiety at d'Artagnan, who was thus thinking, dreaming, or sleeping with his eyes open.

This watching on the part of Planchet had already continued during a long space of time.

Planchet, thinking to rouse his former master, exclaimed, "hum! hum!"

D'Artagnan did not stir.

Planchet then thought it would be necessary to adopt some more efficacious method. After mature reflection the most ingenious plan he could devise under existing circumstances, was to let himself roll off his sack on to the floor, which he effected; and as he rose up, after this feat, he murmured out as condemning his own awkwardness—"Simpleton!"

But great as was the noise produced by the fall of Planchet, d'Artagnan, who, during the course of his life had been accustomed to noises much more terrifying, did not appear to take the slightest notice of it.

Besides, an enormous wagon loaded with stones, coming out of the rue Saint Mederie, drowned by the noise of its wheels the noise of Planchet's fall.

However Planchet imagined that he had seen d'Artagnan smile, as if in tacit assent to the appellation he had given himself of simpleton; but the smile was almost imperceptible.

"Are you asleep, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" said Planchet, softly.

"No, Planchet, I do not *even* sleep," replied the mousquetaire.

"I think I had the misfortune," said Planchet, "to hear you make use of the word *even*."

"Well and what then? is not the word grammatical, master Planchet?"

"Oh! yes, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Well then?"

"Well then, the word afflicts me."

"Explain to me the cause of your affliction, Planchet," said d'Artagnan.

"If you say that you do not even sleep, it is just the same as if you were to say that you had not even the consolation of sleeping."

"Well, go on."

"It is precisely the same as telling me I am wearied to death."

"Planchet, you know that I never am weary."

"Excepting to-day, yesterday and the day before."

"Pooh!"

"M. d'Artagnan, it is eight days since you returned from Fontainebleau; for eight days you have neither had orders to give, nor your company to exercise; you miss the noise of guns and drums and all the bustle of royalty; and moreover, I, who have carried a musket know well what that is."

"Planchet," replied d'Artagnan, "I can assure you that I do not feel dull in the slightest degree."

"And what are you doing there, then, lying as if you were dead?"

"My dear Planchet, when I was at the siege of la Rochelle, when you were there, there was at the siege of la Rochelle an Arab who was celebrated for his expertness in pointing a culverine; he was a fellow of some talent, though his complexion was of a singular color, bordering upon the tinge of your olives. Well, this Arab when he had either eaten or had been at work would lie down as I am lying now, and smoked I know not what magic leaves with a great tube having an amber mouthpiece, and if any chief who happened to be passing reproached him for sleeping so continually, he would very tranquilly reply, it is better to be sitting than standing, lying down than sitting, dead than lying down."

"He was a lugubrious Arab," replied Planchet, "both in color and in sentiment. I remember him perfectly. He used to cut off the heads of the protestants with particular satisfaction."

"Precisely, and used to embalm them when they were worth the trouble."

"Yes, and when he was working at these embalmings with his herbs and all his great plants, he had the appearance of a basket maker, making baskets."

"Yes, Planchet, yes; that's it exactly."

"Oh! I have a tolerably good memory, too."

"I doubt it not; but what do you say to his reasoning?"

"Sir, I think one portion of it excellent, but the other stupid."

"Explain, Planchet, explain."

"Well, sir, in fact it is better to be seated than standing, that is clear enough, particularly when a man is tired; under certain circumstances," and Planchet smiled with a roguish air, "it is better to be lying down than seated; but as to the last axiom, that it is better to be dead than lying down, I declare that I consider it absurd; that

my preference is incontestible in favor of a bed, and if you are not of my opinion, it is because, as I had just now the honor of telling you, you are bored to death."

"Planchet, you know M. Lafontaine?"

"The apothecary at the corner of the rue Saint Mederie."

"No, the fabulist."

"Ah! master crow."

"Precisely! well then, I am his hare."

"He had a hare too, then?"

"He has all sorts of animals."

"Well, and what does his hare do?"

"He reflects."

"Ah! ah!"

"Planchet, I am like M. Lafontaine's hare, I reflect."

"You reflect?" inquired Planchet, anxiously."

"Yes, your house is gloomy enough, Planchet to induce meditation; you will admit that I hope."

"Why, you have a view of the street."

"A pretty recreation truly, is it not?"

"It is not the less true, sir, that if you lodged at the back of the house, you would weary yourself—no, you would reflect still more."

"Upon my faith I do not know, Planchet."

"It would be something, indeed, if your reflections were like those which led you to assist in the restoration of Charles II."

And Planchet gave a slight laugh which was not altogether without meaning.

"Ah! Planchet, my friend, you are becoming ambitious."

"Is there not another king to be restored, Monsieur d'Artagnan, some other Monk to be cooped up in a box."

"No, my dear Planchet, all the kings are seated on their thrones—not quite so comfortably, perhaps, as I am seated on this chair, but, in short, there they are."

And d'Artagnan sighed.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Planchet, "you really grieve me."

"You are very good, Planchet."

"I have a suspicion—God pardon me!"

"And what is that?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you are getting thin."

"Oh!" cried d'Artagnan, striking his chest, which sounded like an empty cuirass, "that is impossible, Planchet."

"Ah! do you see," cried Planchet,

earnestly, "should you get thin in my house—"

"Well?"

"Well! I should do something desperate."

"Oh! that's nonsense."

"Yes, yes, I would."

"Why, what would you do? come, now, tell me."

"I would go to the man who occasions all this grief."

"Oh! now I am in grief!"

"Yes, that is certain."

"No, Planchet, no."

"I tell you that it is so. You have some vexation, and you are getting thin."

"You are sure I am getting thin?"

"Visibly. Malaga! should you get still thinner I will take my rapier, and will go straightway and cut M. d'Herblay's throat."

"Hey!" cried d'Artagnan, starting in his chair, "what's that you say, Planchet? And what has the name of M. d'Herblay to do in your grocer's shop?"

"Good! good! be angry if you will! call me names if you will, but zounds! I know what I know."

D'Artagnan, during this second outbreak of Planchet's, had placed himself in such a position as not to lose an expression of his countenance, that is to say that he was seated with his hands resting upon his knees and his neck stretched out towards the worthy grocer,

"Come, now, explain yourself," said he, "and tell me how it happens that you have uttered so violent a blasphemy against M. d'Herblay, your former officer, my friend, a man of the church, a mousquetaire, who has become a bishop. You would raise your sword against him, Planchet?"

"I would raise my sword against him, against my own father, even, when I see you in such a state as this."

"M. d'Herblay! a nobleman!"

"I care not whether he be a nobleman or not; he causes you bad dreams, that's what I know, and when a man has bad dreams he gets thin. Malaga! I will not have it said that Monsieur d'Artagnan leaves my house thinner than when he came into it."

"And how does he give me these bad dreams? Explain! explain!"

"For the last three nights you have had the nightmare."

"Who. I?"

"Yes, you! And in your nightmare you keep on saying 'Aramis! dark, cunning Aramis!'"

"Ah! did I say that?" anxiously exclaimed d'Artagnan.

"On the faith of Planchet, you did say so."

"Well! and what then? You know the proverb, my good friend, 'dreams go by contraries.'"

"No, no; for every time that you have gone out during the last three days you never missed asking me on your return 'Have you seen M. d'Herblay?' or else 'Have you received any letter for me from M. d'Herblay?'"

"But it seems to me perfectly natural that I should feel interested for that dear friend."

"Undoubtedly; but not to such a degree as to diminish from it."

"Planchet, I will get fatter—I pledge my word of honor that I will."

"Well, sir, I accept it; for I know that when you give your word of honor it is sacred."

"I will dream no more of Aramis."

"That is right."

"I will not ask again if there are letters from M. d'Herblay."

"Perfectly well."

"But you must explain to me one thing."

"Speak on, sir."

"I am very observing—"

"I know that well."

"And just now you made use of a singular oath."

"Yes."

"And which is not usual with you."

"Malaga! I suppose you mean."

"Precisely."

"It is my oath since I have become a grocer."

"I understand—it is the name of a sort of raisin."

"It is my oath when I am perfectly ferocious; when once I have said Malaga! I am no longer a man."

"But I never heard you make use of it till now."

"That is true, sir; it was recommended to me by a dear friend."

And Planchet, while uttering these words, winked his eyes in a cunning manner, which much excited d'Artagnan's attention.

"Hey! hey!" he exclaimed.

Planchet repeated "Hey! hey!"

"Ho! ho! M. Planchet."

"By the Lord, sir," said Planchet, "I am not like you—I do not pass my life in reflecting."

"You are wrong."

"I meant to say, in being dull and gloomy. We have but a short space to live, should we not enjoy it as we can?"

"You are an epicurean philosopher, it would appear, Planchet."

"And why not? The hand is still steady, and can write, and can weigh out sugar and spices. The feet are firm, we can walk and talk; the stomach has good teeth, and we devour, and we digest; the heart has not become too horny. Well sir?"

"Well what, Planchet?"

"Ah! that's it! that's it!" cried Planchet, rubbing his hands joyously.

D'Artagnan put one leg over the other.

"Planchet!" cried he, "you stupify me with surprise."

"And how so?"

"Because you are revealing yourself to me under an absolutely new light."

Planchet feeling flattered in the highest degree, continued rubbing his hands with the greatest glee.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "you think because I am but a poor devil, that I am a simpleton."

"Very well, Planchet, I call that reasoning."

"Follow well my idea, sir, I have said to myself, sir," continued Planchet, "that without pleasure there is no happiness in this world. Therefore let us take, if not pleasure—for pleasure is not so very common an affair—at all events some degree of consolation."

"And you console yourself."

"Precisely."

"Explain to me your method of consoling yourself."

"I carry a shield with me to defend myself against ennui; I calculate beforehand when I shall become out of patience, and on the eve of the day when I feel that I shall be dull, I amuse myself."

"There is no more difficulty in the matter than that?"

"No."

"And you have arranged all this before, out of your own head?"

"My own idea entirely."

"It is miraculous."

"What say you to it?"

"I say that your philosophy has not its equal in the world."

"Then follow my example."

"It is very tempting."

"Do as I do."

"I ask for nothing better; but all men have not the same dispositions, and perhaps were I to endeavor to amuse myself in the same way that you do, it would bore me dreadfully."

"Bah! only try it."

"And what is it that you do? Come tell me."

"Have you remarked that I am absent every now and then?"

"Yes."

"In a certain way?"

"Periodically."

"That's it, upon my word. And you have observed it?"

"My dear Planchet, you will understand when two people are together almost every day, when one absents himself the other naturally misses him. Do you not miss me when I go on a campaign?"

"Immensely. That is to say I am as a body without a soul."

"This being admitted, let us continue."

"At what periods do I absent myself?"

"On the fifteenth and thirtieth of each month."

"And I remain absent?"

"Sometimes three, sometimes four days."

"What did you think I went away for?"

"To collect your debts."

"And when I returned, you thought my countenance—?"

"Evinced great satisfaction."

"You see, you have yourself said the words, great satisfaction. And to what did you attribute this satisfaction?"

"I imagined that your business was succeeding well; that your purchases of rice, prunes, and raw sugar, dried pears and molasses, had brought you marvellously good profits. Your character has always been very picturesque, Planchet; and therefore I was not astonished to see you select the grocery business; which is one of the most diversified of trades, and of the sweetest nature."

"It is well reasoned, sir, but what an error you have fallen into!"

"How! have I been mistaken?"

"When you believe that I go every fortnight to collect money or to make purchases. Oh! oh! sir, how the deuce could you have imagined such a thing? Ha! ha! ha!"

And Planchet laughed in such a

way as to inspire d'Artagnan with the most injurious doubts as to his own intelligence.

"I acknowledge," said the mousquetaire, "that my comprehension cannot vie with yours."

"Sir, that is true."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It cannot be otherwise than true, since you yourself say so; but please to remark that this does not at all lower you in my esteem."

"That is really very fortunate."

"No, you are a man of genius, you; and when the question regards war, military tactics, surprising an enemy, or a coup-de-main, by our lady, kings are but poor devils in comparison with you; but for the tranquillity of the soul, the care of the body, the preserves, if I may call them so, necessary to life; ah! sir, say not a word of men of genius; they are their own executioners."

"Good! Planchet!" cried d'Artagnan, burning with curiosity, "you really interest me in the highest degree."

"You already feel less dull than you did a short time ago, do you not?"

"I was not dull even then; but since you have been speaking to me, I am more amused."

"Come, come, that is a good beginning, and I will cure you, that I answer for."

"I ask nothing better."

"Would you like me to try?"

"Immediately, if you will."

"Be it so: have you your horses here?"

"Yes: ten, twenty, thirty."

"We should not want so many: two would be sufficient."

"They are at your disposal, Planchet."

"Good! I will take you with me."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Where?"

"Ah! you are now asking me too much."

"However, you must acknowledge that it is important I should know where I am going."

"Are you fond of the country?"

"But so, so, Planchet."

"Then you prefer the city."

"That depends—"

"Well then, I will take you to a place which is half town, half country."

"Good!"

"To a place where I am certain you will amuse yourself."

"Excellent well."

"And what is more miraculous, to a place from which you have returned because it wearied you."

"Who, me?"

"Mortally."

"Then, 'tis to Fontainebleau you are going."

"Precisely, to Fontainebleau."

"You are going to Fontainebleau?"

"I am."

"And what are you going to Fontainebleau for, good Heaven?"

Planchet replied by winking his eyes in a most provoking and amusing manner.

"Ah! you villain! you have an estate out that way?" said d'Artagnan, smiling.

"Oh! a mere trifle, a poor cottage."

"Ah! I have caught you?"

"But it is very pretty, upon my word."

"I am going to Planchet's country seat!" exclaimed d'Artagnan.

"Whenever you please."

"Did we not say to-morrow?"

"Well to-morrow be it. And besides, to-morrow is the fourteenth; that is to say, the eve of the day on which I fear to be getting weary." So it is agreed?"

"Agreed."

"You will lend me one of your horses?"

"The best I have."

"No, I would rather have the quietest. I have never been a good horseman, and that you know well. And besides, since I have been in the grocery business, I have become rusty; and besides—"

"Besides what?"

"And besides," said Planchet with another wink, "I do not wish to over-fatigue myself."

"And for what reason?" d'Artagnan ventured to inquire.

"Because I should not amuse myself so well," replied Planchet.

And thereupon he rose from his sack of indian corn drawing himself up proudly and looking well satisfied with himself.

"Planchet! Planchet!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, "I declare to you there is not a Sybarite in the world to be compared with you; ah! Planchet, it is clearly to be perceived that we have not yet eaten a ton of salt together."

"And why so, sir?"

"Because I do not yet know you," said d'Artagnan, "and that decidedly

I again think of you as I did for a moment on the day when you at Calais strangled, or nearly so, Luben, the Count de Wardes' valet, and that was, that you are a man of great resource."

Planchet began to laugh with an air almost of self-conceit, bade good night to the mousquetaire, and went down stairs into his back shop, which served him as a bed room.

D'Artagnan resumed his former position in his chair, and his brow, unwrinkled for a moment, became more pensive than ever.

He had already forgotten Planchet's follies and his dreams.

"Yes," said he, renewing the thread of his meditations, which had been interrupted by the agreeable conversation of which he have just given a report, "yes, all lies in that."

1st. To know what Baisemeaux wanted of Aramis.

2dly. To know why Aramis does not let me hear from him.

3dly. To know where Porthos is.

"Under these three heads lies all the mystery."

"Now," continued d'Artagnan, "since our friends acknowledge nothing to us, let us have recourse to our own poor intelligence. We do as much as we are able *Mordious!* or *Malaga!* as Planchet has it."

CHAPTER LXIII.

M. BAISEMEAUX'S LETTER.

FAITHFUL to his plan, d'Artagnan went the next morning to pay a visit to M. Baisemeaux.

It was cleaning day at the Bastille, the cannon had been furbished up, brushed and polished, the staircases washed down, the turnkeys appeared to be occupied in cleaning even the keys of the dungeons.

As to the soldiers of the garrison they were sauntering about the court-yards, pretending that they were clean enough.

The commandant, Baisemeaux, received d'Artagnan more than politely, but he was so tenaciously reserved with him, that in spite of all d'Artagnan's cunning he could not extract a single word from him.

The more he restrained himself within these limits, so much the more did d'Artagnan's mistrust increase.

The latter thought he could observe that the commandant acted in this manner in consequence of some recent recommendation.

Baisemeaux at the Palais Royal had not been the same cold impenetrable personage with regard to d'Artagnan, that the latter found in Baisemeaux of the Bastille.

When d'Artagnan wished to make him speak respecting the so urgent money matters which had induced Baisemeaux to seek for Aramis, and rendered him so communicative on that evening, Baisemeaux pretended that he had some pressing orders to give in the prison and left d'Artagnan so long kicking his heels, that our mousquetaire being certain of not obtaining any further information, left the Bastille before Baisemeaux returned from his inspection.

But d'Artagnan's suspicions were awakened and when that was once the case d'Artagnan could no longer sleep.

He was to men what the cat is with respect to quadrupeds, the emblem at once of anxiety and impatience.

An impatient cat can no more remain upon one spot than the silky film which is put in motion by every breath of air.

A cat when watching will die at its post of observation, and neither hunger nor thirst can induce it to leave it for a moment.

D'Artagnan, who was burning with impatience, shook off that feeling, as being too heavy a burden. He argued that the thing which they attempted to conceal was precisely that it was most important to discover.

And consequently he reflected that Baisemeaux would not fail to forewarn Aramis, if Aramis had given him any particular instructions with regard to him. And this, in fact, did happen.

Baisemeaux had scarcely time enough to return from the keep of the prison when d'Artagnan had placed himself in ambush in the rue du Petit-Musc, in such a position as to see every person who issued from the Bastille.

After having stood sentinel nearly an hour at the "Golden Harrow," under the porch of which there was some shade, d'Artagnan saw a soldier coming out of the castle.

Now this was the very best indication he could have. Every keeper or turnkey has his days or even his hours for coming out of the Bastille, because they are all forbidden to have their wives or even lodging in the prison;

they can therefore come out without exciting curiosity.

But a soldier when forming part of the guard is shut up there during twenty-four hours, and this was well known, and to d'Artagnan more positively than to any other person. This soldier therefore could not have left the prison during his time of service, but by an express and urgent order.

The soldier, say we, came out of the bastille, but slowly, 'slowly, as a happy mortal, who, instead of an annoying watch before an insipid guard room, or on a bastion no less disagreeable, has the good fortune to obtain his liberty and a pleasant walk, these two pleasures being considered as a part of his service. He walked on towards the faubourg Saint Antoine, snuffing the air, enjoying the sunshine, and looking at the women.

D'Artagnan followed him at a distance. He had not yet made up his mind as to the course he should pursue.

"I must, first of all, see the fellow's face," said he, to himself. "A man once seen is a man of whom we can form an opinion."

D'Artagnan therefore mended his pace, and, no very difficult matter, soon got ahead of the soldier.

Not only did he see his face, which was sufficiently intelligent and resolute, but he saw his nose, which was somewhat red.

"The fellow is fond of brandy," said he, to himself.

At the same time that he observed the rubicund nose, he saw that the soldier had a white paper stuck into his belt.

"Good! there is a letter," added d'Artagnan.

The only difficulty was to get hold of the letter.

Now, a soldier who is chosen as an estafette by M. Baisemeaux, is too well satisfied to sell his trust.

As d'Artagnan was biting his fingers the soldier kept on, walking leisurely up the faubourg Saint Antoine.

"He is, undoubtedly, going to Saint Mandé," thought he, "and I shall not know the contents of that confounded letter."

This thought was enough to drive him mad.

"If I were in uniform," continued d'Artagnan, to himself, "I would have the fellow hanged, and the letter with him. The first guard room I came to

would give me their assistance. But the devil, I cannot give my name in a matter of this sort. If I were to invite him to drink he would suspect something. *Mordoux!* my invention seems to be exhausted, and I am no longer fit for any thing. Were I to attack the unfortunate fellow, make him draw his sword, kill him, in order to obtain possession of his letter? Oh! were it but a letter from a queen to a lord, or from a cardinal to a queen, that would be quite another matter; but good heaven! in such paltry, miserable intrigues as those of Messieurs Aramis and M. Fouquet, against M. Colbert. The life of a man for such a secret as that? Oh! no, not even ten crown pieces."

While he was philosophizing in this way, biting his fingers, and chewing his moustache, he saw a small group of archers with a commissary of police.

These men were taking off a handsome looking gentleman who was struggling violently.

The archers had torn his clothes, and were dragging him along.

He requested them to conduct themselves towards him with more respect, asserting that he was a gentleman and a soldier.

He saw our soldier walking along the street, and called out—

"Help me, soldier!"

The soldier went up to him—the crowd followed him.

An idea then struck d'Artagnan.

It was the first he had been able to form, and it will be seen that it was by no means a bad one.

While the gentleman was relating to the soldier that he had just been caught in a house, and arrested as a robber, whereas, in truth, he was only a lover, and the soldier was compassionating him, and giving him advice, with that gravity which the French soldier always assumes when discussing any thing that excites his self-love, and the dignity of the service, d'Artagnan slipped behind the soldier, who, surrounded by the crowd, and pressed on all sides, was too much occupied to think of himself, and dexterously and quickly snatched from his belt the so much coveted paper.

As at that moment the gentleman with the torn clothes was dragging at the soldier, as the commissary was dragging at the gentleman, d'Artagnan performed this operation without the slightest danger of discovery.

He retired behind the columns of a gateway, and read the address of the letter; it was as follows:

"To Monsieur du Vallon, at Monsieur Fouquet's, Saint Mandé."

"Good!" said he; and he unsealed the envelope without tearing it, drew from it a paper folded squarely, which contained only the following words:—

"Dear Monsieur du Vallon:—Be pleased to acquaint M. d'Herblay that he has been at the Bastille, and has questioned Your devoted
DE BAISEMEAUX."

"This is as it should be," cried d'Artagnan: "the affair is now altogether limpid. Aramis will now be sure of knowing what he wants to know. *Mordieu*," thought he; "here is a poor devil of a soldier whom that close fellow, Baisemeaux, will punish most severely for the trick I have played. If he should return to the Bastille without a letter what will they do to him? In fact, I have no further occasion for this letter; when the egg is swallowed the shell is of no use."

D'Artagnan saw that the commissary and the archers had convinced the soldier, for they were carrying off their prisoner. The latter was still accompanied by the crowd, and continued venting his complaints and grievances.

D'Artagnan went into the middle of the crowd, and let fall the letter without any one perceiving him, and then quickly retired.

The soldier resumed his walk towards Saint Mandé, thinking much of the gentleman who had implored his protection.

Suddenly he thought a little of his letter, and looking down to his belt, found that it had disappeared. A cry of terror which he uttered was pleasing to d'Artagnan. The poor soldier cast his eyes around him with feverish agony, and at last he perceived it lying on the pavement, some twenty yards behind him. He darted upon it like a falcon on its prey. The envelope was somewhat soiled, somewhat rumpled, but, at least, the letter was found again.

D'Artagnan saw that the soldier was much distressed on perceiving that the seal was broken. The worthy fellow at last seemed to console himself, and this time put the letter carefully into the breast of his coat.

"Go on," thought d'Artagnan, "I have plenty of time now—he shall pre-

cede me. It appears that Aramis is not at Paris since Baisemeaux writes to Porthos. That dear Porthos, with what delight shall I again see him, and converse with him."

And regulating his pace on that of the soldier, he promised himself to reach Monsieur Fouquet's house about a quarter of an hour after him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL PERCEIVE
WITH PLEASURE THAT PORTHOS HAS
NOT LOST ANY OF HIS STRENGTH.

D'ARTAGNAN had, according to his usual habit, calculated that every hour is worth sixty minutes, and every minute sixty seconds.

Thanks to this exact and minute calculation of minutes and seconds, he reached the superintendent's door at the moment the soldier was issuing from it.

D'Artagnan presented himself at the gate which a door-keeper, whose clothes were bedizened with lace at every seam, held only ajar.

D'Artagnan would have wished to get into the house without giving his name, but this was out of the question; he therefore told the porter who he was.

Notwithstanding this concession, which ought at once to have removed every difficulty—at all events, that was d'Artagnan's opinion—the porter still hesitated: however, on hearing the title of captain of the king's guards repeated a second time, the man, without opening the gate widely, no longer absolutely prevented his entering.

D'Artagnan understood that a formidable precautionary order had been given.

He therefore decided upon lying—a matter which did not concern him much, when by a lie he thought he might insure the safety of the state.

He therefore added to the declaration he had already made, that the soldier who had just brought the letter addressed to M. du Vallon, was merely his own messenger, and that the object of the letter was to announce his coming.

After that no opposition was made to d'Artagnan's entrance, and he accordingly went into the house.

A valet wished to accompany him,

but d'Artagnan told him there was no necessity for his giving himself that trouble, as he knew perfectly well where to find M. du Vallon.

What could be said to a man who appeared so well acquainted with the house?

D'Artagnan was therefore left to do as he pleased.

Vestibule, drawing-room, garden—all were passed in review by the mousquetaire. He walked about this house, more magnificent than a royal abode, during a quarter of an hour; every piece of furniture was a marvel, and there were as many servants as columns and doors.

"Decidedly," said he, "this house has no other boundary than the boundaries of the earth."

He at length reached a remote part of the chateau, surrounded by a wall of hewn stone, upon which were trained a number of exotic plants, loaded with flowers of most magnificent color and dimensions.

At regular distances upon this wall, were placed statues, the pose of which was timid or mysterious. They were either vestals, apparently endeavoring to conceal themselves, or, enfolded in their marble veils, looking with watchful eyes towards the palace.

A Hermes, with his finger on his lips; an Iris, with extended wings; Night, with her poppies circling her dark brows—were the predominating deities of this garden; behind which could be perceived, through the branches of the trees, several buildings of elegant appearance.

All these statues stood out in bold relief from the back ground of dark cypress trees, which raised their dark, black summits towering towards the sky.

All these enchantments appeared to the mousquetaire to be the supreme effort of the human intellect. His own mind was at that moment full of poetry. The idea that Porthos inhabited such an Eden gave him a still higher opinion of Porthos than he had ever entertained: so true it is that even the most elevated minds are not exempt from being influenced by surrounding objects.

D'Artagnan came to a door, and in this door he discovered a secret spring, which he pressed upon.

The door flew open.

D'Artagnan entered the building, closed the door, and found himself in

a pavilion of a circular form, in which he heard no other noise than the murmuring of cascades and the warbling of birds.

He soon after saw a lackey.

"It is here," said d'Artagnan without hesitation, "that the Baron du Vallon resides, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," replied the lackey.

"Inform him that the Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of his majesty's mousquetaires, is waiting for him."

The lackey took him into a drawing-room.

D'Artagnan did not remain long in suspense. A well known step shook the floor of the adjoining room. A door opened or rather was broken in, and Porthos rushed into his friend's arms, although looking somewhat confused.

"You here?" he exclaimed.

"And you?" replied d'Artagnan.

"Ah! sly fellow! ah!"

"Yes," said Porthos, smiling confusedly, "yes; you find me in M. Fouquet's house, and that astonishes you a little, does it not?"

"Not at all. Why should you not be one of M. Fouquet's friends? Monsieur Fouquet has many friends, above all among men of talent.

Porthos had the modesty not to accept the compliment as addressed to himself.

"Besides," said he, "you saw me at Belle-Isle."

"A better reason still for my being induced to believe that you are one of M. Fouquet's friends."

"The fact is that I am acquainted with him," said Porthos with some degree of embarrassment.

"Ah! my friend," said d'Artagnan, "how guilty are you towards me!"

"And how so," cried Porthos.

"How! you complete a work so admirable as the fortifications of Belle-Isle, and you do not inform me of it!"

Porthos blushed.

"And more than this," continued d'Artagnan, "you saw me yonder, you know that I am with the king, and you do not imagine that the king, anxious to be informed as to the man of talent who has accomplished a work of which he had heard so many marvels, you do not imagine that the king has sent me to ascertain who that man really is?"

"How! did the king send you to inquire?"

"Certainly; but let us say no more about it."

"Zounds! on the contrary," cried

Porthos, "let us talk about it; so the king knew that Belle-Isle was being fortified."

"Good! does not the king know every thing?"

"But he did not know who was fortifying it."

"No; he only suspected from what he had heard about the works that it was some illustrious warrior."

"The devil!" cried Porthos, "had I known that?"

"You would not have run away from Vannes, would you?"

"No; what did you say when you no longer found me there?"

"My dear friend, I reflected."

"Yes, you reflect, you do; and what did your reflections lead you to?"

"To divining the whole truth."

"Ah! you did divine it then?"

"Yes."

"What was it that you guessed? come now, tell me," said Porthos arranging himself comfortably in an arm-chair, and assuming the penetration of a sphynx.

"First of all I guessed that you were fortifying Belle-Isle."

"Oh! there was nothing very difficult in that, you saw me at work."

"Wait a moment; I guessed something else, I guessed that you were fortifying Belle-Isle by order of M. Fouquet."

"That is true."

"But that is not all; when I once set to work guessing I do not stop in the way."

"The dear d'Artagnan!"

"I guessed that M. Fouquet wished that these fortifications should remain a profound secret."

"It was in fact, his intention; that is to say, as far as my belief goes," said Porthos.

"Yes, but do you know why he wished it to remain a secret?"

"Why; that the thing might not be known," replied Porthos.

"In the first place; but that wish was subjected to the idea of a gallantry he had projected."

"In fact," said Porthos, "I have heard that M. Fouquet is very gallant."

"Oh! not in that way; this was a gallantry he wished to surprise the king with."

"Oh! oh!"

"That astonishes you?"

"Yes."

"You did not know that?"

"No."

"Well then, I know it, I do."

"Are you then a sorcerer?"

"Not in the slightest degree."

"How do you know it then?"

"Ah! that is it; by the most simple means in the world, I heard M. Fouquet say so himself to the king."

"Say, what?"

"That he had fortified Belle-Isle for him, and that he made him a present of Belle-Isle."

"Ah! you heard M. Fouquet say that to the king?"

"In so many words," he even added, 'Belle-Isle has been fortified by one of my friends, an engineer, a man of great merit who I shall ask permission to present to the king.' 'His name?' demanded the king. 'The Baron du Vallon,' replied Fouquet. 'Well then,' added the king you will present him to me."

"Did the king say that?" cried Porthos.

"On the faith of d'Artagnan."

"Oh! oh!" cried Porthos, "and why have I not been presented then?"

"Have they not spoken to you of this presentation?"

"Oh! yes; but I am still waiting for it."

"Make yourself easy; it will come."

"Hum! hum!" growled Porthos.

D'Artagnan did not appear to have heard him and turned the conversation.

"But it appears to me you inhabit a very lonely place here, my dear friend," said he.

"I have been always fond of solitude, I am of a melancholy turn," replied Porthos with a sigh.

"Well now, that's strange," said d'Artagnan, "I had never remarked that."

"It is since I have devoted myself to study," rejoined Porthos with a sorrowful air.

"But the exertions of the mind have not been prejudicial, I hope, to the health of the body?"

"Oh! not in the least."

"Your strength is great as ever?"

"Oh! I am only too well, my friend, too well."

"I ask, because I had heard say that the first few days after your arrival—"

"That I could not move at all, was that it?"

"How!" cried d'Artagnan with a sigh, "and on what account was it that you could not move?"

Porthos comprehended that he had

said too much, and wished to recall his words.

"Yes, I came from Belle-Isle on some new horses and that had fatigued me."

"Oh! I am not astonished at that, for I, who was coming after you, saw seven or eight of your horses dead upon the road."

"I am a great weight, do you see," said Porthos.

"So that you were completely worn out."

"My fat had melted, and that fat had made me ill."

"Ah! poor Porthos! And how did Aramis behave to you in all this?"

"Very well; he sent for M. Fouquet's own physician to attend me. But only imagine, at the end of a week I could no longer breathe."

"And how was that?"

"The room was too small; I absorbed too much air."

"Really?"

"At least, so they told me; and for that reason I was transferred to other quarters."

"Where you could breathe, I suppose?"

"More freely, yes; but no exercise, nothing to do. The physician pretended that I ought not to stir; I, on the contrary, felt myself stronger than ever. But this occasioned a very serious accident."

"What accident?"

"Figure to yourself, my dear friend, that I rebelled against the orders of this blockhead of a physician, and that I resolved on going out whether it suited him or not. I consequently ordered the valet who waited on me to bring me my clothes."

"Then you were kept quite naked, my poor Porthos?"

"Not at all; I had a magnificent dressing gown. The lackey obeyed. I dressed myself in my own clothes, which had become too wide for me. But, strange to say, though my clothes had become too wide—"

"Yes, I understand you perfectly."

"My boots had become too tight."

"Your feet had remained swelled."

"There now, you have guessed it at once."

"No wonder! And is this the accident you wished to tell me of?"

"Oh! you shall hear. I had not made the same reflection that you did just now. I said to myself, since my feet had gone into these boots ten times

there was no reason for their not entering the eleventh."

"But this time, my dear Porthos, allow me to observe you, that your logic failed you."

"In short, I was sitting opposite to a wainscotted partition. I was trying to get on my right boot: I pulled at it with my hands; I pushed with all the strength of my legs; I made the most strenuous efforts; when suddenly both the loops of my boots came off in my hands, my foot flew forward like a catapult."

"Catapult! how learned you are in all terms of fortification, my dear Porthos."

"My foot flew forward like a catapult, and came in contact with the partition, which gave way. Oh! my friend, I thought that like Samson I had demolished the temple. That which fell from this one blow in paintings, porcelain, flower-vases, tapestry, and curtain rods, is perfectly astounding."

"Really?"

"Without calculating that on the further side of the partition was a stand loaded with porcelain."

"You do not say so."

"Which flew to the end of the other room."

Porthos paused to laugh.

"In truth, as you say, it is astounding," and d'Artagnan laughed as heartily as Porthos.

On seeing which Porthos laughed still more boisterously than before.

"With this kick," cried Porthos, in a voice half choked by his increasing hilarity, "I smashed to pieces more than three thousand livres worth of porcelain. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Capital!" cried d'Artagnan.

"I broke more than four thousand livres worth of glass, ha! ha! ha!"

"Excellent."

"Without counting that which fell upon my head, and which was broken into a thousand pieces."

"Upon your head?" cried d'Artagnan, holding his sides.

"Yes, plump."

"Then you had your head broken?"

"No, since as I told you it was the lustre that broke like glass as it was."

"Oh! it was a glass lustre?"

"Yes; and Venetian glass, too; a perfect curiosity; a lustre which had not its fellow in the world; a piece of furniture that weighed two hundred pounds."

"And which fell upon your head?"

"Upon—my—head! Only figure to yourself a crystal globe, all gilt, encrusted, with burners beneath it for perfumes, and above tubes which sent forth flame when it was lighted."

"I understand; but it was not so."

"Fortunately; for otherwise I should have been in a complete blaze."

"But as it was you were only flattened?"

"Not at all."

"How, not at all?"

"Why no; it fell upon my cranium. Now, as I am told, we have on the summit of our heads a crust which is extremely thick and solid."

"And who was it told you this, Porthos?"

"The doctor; a sort of dome, that would even bear the weight of our cathedral of Notre Dame at Paris."

"No, really?"

"Yes; it appears that our cranium is so formed—"

"Speak for yourself, my friend, it is your cranium that is formed in that way, not those of others."

"That is possible," said Porthos, with self satisfaction; "but be that as it may, when the lustre fell upon this dome which we have on the top of the head, the noise was similar to the report of a field piece, the glass was broken, and I fell inundated."

"With blood?—poor Porthos!"

"No, with perfumes, which smelt like custards; the odor was delightful, but too powerful. I was almost giddy with the sweet smells. You have, perhaps, experienced that sometimes, d'Artagnan, have you not?"

"Yes, particularly when inhaling the perfume of lilies of the valley. So that, my poor friend, you were knocked down by the shock, and almost stifled with the perfumes."

"But that which is most surprising in all this—and the doctor affirmed to me on his honor that he had never met with such a case in all his practice—"

"You had at least a bump," said d'Artagnan, interrupting him.

"I had five."

"And why five?"

"I will tell you. At the lower extremity of the lustre were five gilded ornaments, extremely sharp—"

"Oh! oh!"

"These five ornaments penetrated through my hair, which as you see is very thick—"

"Happily it is so."

"And came in contact with my

skin; but only remark the extraordinary fact, such things happen but to me; instead of making dents in my head, they raised bumps! The doctor could never explain this to me in a satisfactory manner."

"Well, I will explain it to you."

"You will do me a service," said Porthos, winking his eyes, which with him was a sign that his attention was excited to the highest degree.

"Since you have set your brain to meditate on studies of high import, on calculations of great difficulty, your head has taken advantage of it; so that at this moment it is too replete with knowledge."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it: the result of this is, that, instead of allowing any thing extraneous to penetrate your head, your bony casket, which is already full to overflowing, takes advantage of any openings that may be made, to allow the superfluity to escape."

"Ah!" cried Porthos—to whom this explanation appeared much clearer than that of the physician—

"The five protuberances occasioned by the five ornaments of the lustre, were undoubtedly accumulations of knowledge, brought to the surface by a concatenation of circumstances."

"It must be so," said Porthos, "and a convincing proof of it is, that I felt more pain on the outside than within. I will even acknowledge to you that when I put my hat upon my head, forcing it on with that graceful energy which we gentlemen of the sword are accustomed to; well, if the blow I gave with my fist was not nicely calculated, it occasioned me the most violent pain."

"Porthos, I can well believe it."

"So, my good friend," continued the giant, "M. Fouquet seeing the want of solidity in his house, decided on giving me another lodging, and in consequence I was placed here."

"It is the reserved park, is it not?"

"Yes."

"The one for rendezvous? The one that is so celebrated in the mysterious stories told of the superintendent?"

"I do not know; I have not seen either any rendezvous or heard any mysterious stories; but I am authorized to exercise my muscles, and I profit by the permission by pulling up trees by the roots."

"And for what purpose?"

"To keep my strength in play; and

besides that I find it more convenient than climbing up the trees to take birds' nests."

"You are as pastoral as Tyrsis, my dear Porthos."

"Yes, I like small eggs; I like them infinitely better than large ones: you can have no idea how delicate an omelette is made of four or five hundred eggs—goldfinches, green-finches, starlings, black-birds and thrushes—oh! their eggs are excellent."

"Five hundred eggs! why that is monstrous!" cried d'Artagnan.

"They will all go into a salad bowl," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan sat for five minutes admiring Porthos, as if he had then met him for the first time.

As to Porthos, his heart seemed to expand beneath the gaze of his old friend.

CHAPTER LXV.

D'ARTAGNAN AND PORTHOS.

THEY remained thus for some minutes; d'Artagnan was evidently seeking for some means of giving a new turn to the conversation.

"Do you amuse yourself much here, Porthos?" at length said d'Artagnan, having doubtless discovered the method he had been seeking.

"Not always."

"I can easily conceive that; but when you begin to find this sort of life too wearisome, what will you do?"

"Oh! I am not going to remain here long. Aramis is only waiting till my last bump shall disappear, to present me to the king, who has a great antipathy to bumps, as I have been told."

"Aramis then is still in Paris?"

"No."

"And where is he?"

"He is at Fontainebleau."

"Alone?"

"With M. Fouquet."

"Very well. But do you know one thing?"

"No; tell me, and I shall know it."

"It is, that I believe Aramis forgets you."

"Do you think so?"

"Down yonder, do you see, they laugh, they dance, they feast, they make the corks fly from M. Mazarin's old bottles. Do you know that they

have a ballet every evening at Fontainebleau?"

"The deuse! the deuse!"

"I declare to you therefore that your dear Aramis forgets you."

"That is not improbable, and I have even thought so now and then."

"Unless he is betraying you, the cunning fellow."

"Oh!"

"You know that Aramis is a sly fox."

"Yes, but betray me—"

"Listen to me; in the first place he sequesters you."

"How! he sequesters me! Am I sequestered?"

"Assuredly."

"I should like to hear you prove that."

"Nothing can be more easy. Do you go out?"

"Never."

"Do you ride on horseback?"

"Never."

"Are your friends allowed to approach you?"

"Never."

"Well, then, my friend, never to go out, never to ride on horseback, never to see one's friends—that may really be termed being sequestered."

"And why should Aramis sequester me?" inquired Porthos.

"Come now," said d'Artagnan, "be frank, Porthos."

"As gold."

"It was Aramis who drew the plans of the fortifications at Belle-Isle, was it not?"

Porthos blushed.

"Yes," he replied, "but that is all he did."

"Precisely, and my opinion is that it is not so very great an affair."

"It is mine, also."

"Good! I am delighted that we agree in this opinion."

"He never even came to Belle-Isle," said Porthos.

"You see now."

"It was I who went to Vannes, as you may have seen."

"Say, rather, as I did see. Well, then, this is precisely the state of the case, my dear Porthos. Aramis, who only made the plans, would wish to be considered as the engineer, while you, who stone by stone built the wall, the citadel and the bastions, he would reduce you to the rank of a mere builder."

"A builder, that is to say a mason."

"A mason, that is it precisely."

"A mere pounder of mortar."

"Exactly."

"A laborer."

"You have it."

"Oh! oh! dear Aramis, you think you are still but twenty-five years old, it seems!"

"That is not all; he thinks that you are fifty."

"I should like to have seen him at work."

"So should I."

"A fellow who has the gout."

"Yes."

"The lumbago."

"Yes."

"Who has lost three teeth."

"Four."

"While I, on the contrary—see here!"

And Porthos, opening his thick lips, exhibited two rows of teeth, something less white than snow, but as clean, as hard, and as sound as ivory.

"You cannot conceive, Porthos," said d'Artagnan, "what an affection the king has for good teeth. Yours decide the matter—I will present you to the king."

"You!"

"And why not? Do you believe that I have less influence at court than Aramis."

"Oh! no."

"Do you believe that I have the slightest pretensions as to the fortifications at Belle-Isle?"

"Oh! certainly not."

"It is then only for your interest that I should act."

"I do not doubt it."

"Well, then, I am the intimate friend of the king, and the proof is that when there is any thing disagreeable to be said to him, it is I who take upon myself to say it."

"But, my dear friend, should you present me—"

"What then?"

"Aramis would be angry."

"With me?"

"No, with me."

"Pooh! Whether it be Aramis or myself that presents you, since you are to be presented, it matters not, it is precisely the same thing."

"I was to have had some clothes made."

"Why, yours are splendid."

"Oh! those I had ordered were much handsomer."

"Beware, Porthos, the king is an admirer of simplicity."

"Well, then, I will dress plainly. But what will M. Fouquet say when he knows that I am gone?"

"Are you then a prisoner on parole?"

"No, not altogether. But I had promised him not to absent myself without previously telling him of it."

"Stay, stay, we will talk of that, presently. Have you any thing to do here?"

"Who, I?—nothing; nothing of much importance, at any rate."

"Unless, however, that you are engaged in any matter of serious importance for Aramis."

"No, i'faith!"

"What I am saying, you understand, is from my interest for you. I suppose, for instance, that you have charge of sending any messengers or letters that may arrive for Aramis?"

"Ah! letters, yes. I send him certain letters."

"And where to?"

"To Fontainebleau."

"And have you any such letters?"

"Why—"

"Merely answer me. Have you any such letters?"

"I have precisely received one, and not long ago."

"Interesting?"

"I imagine so."

"You do not read them, then?"

"I am not curious."

And Porthos drew from his pocket the letter brought by the soldier, which he had not, but which d'Artagnan had, read.

"Do you know what you should do?" said d'Artagnan.

"Zounds! what I always do, send it to him."

"Oh! no."

"What! should I keep it?"

"No, nor that either. Were you not told that this letter is important?"

"Very important."

"Well then; you should carry it yourself to Fontainebleau."

"To Aramis?"

"Yes."

"You are right."

"And as the king is there—"

"You will take the opportunity?"

"Yes."

"I had not even thought of that, it is notwithstanding very simple."

"And therefore is it urgent, my dear

Porthos, that we should set off immediately."

"In truth," said Porthos, "the sooner we set out, the less will be the delay the despatch for Aramis will be subjected to."

"Porthos, you always reason powerfully, and with you, logic seconds the imagination."

"You think so?" said Porthos.

"This is the result of your serious studies," replied d'Artagnan. "Come, let us be off."

"But," said Porthos, "my promise to M. Fouquet."

"What promise?"

"Not to leave Saint Mandé without first acquainting him with my intention."

"Ah! my dear Porthos," said d'Artagnan, "how very young you are!"

"And how so?"

"You will arrive at Fontainebleau, will you not?"

"Well?"

"You there find M. Fouquet."

"Yes."

"With the king most probably."

"With the king," majestically repeated Porthos.

"And you will go straight to him, and say, 'M. Fouquet I have the honor to forewarn you that I have just left Saint Mandé.'"

"And," said Porthos in the same majestic tone, "seeing me at Fontainebleau, with the king, M. Fouquet will not be able to say that I speak falsely."

"My dear Porthos, I was just opening my lips to say so, you forestall me in every thing; oh! Porthos what a gifted nature you possess, age has no hold upon you."

"Not much."

"Well then all is settled?"

"I believe so."

"Your scruples have all vanished?"

"I think they have."

"Then I take you with me."

"Precisely—I will order my horses to be saddled."

"You have horses here?"

"I have five."

"Which you have had brought from Pierrefonds?"

"Which M. Fouquet has given to me."

"My dear Porthos, we do not want five horses for only two persons; moreover, I have three at Paris, that would make eight, and eight would be too many."

"It would not be too many if I had my people here. But, alas! I have them not."

"Do you regret not having your servants with you?"

"I regret Mousqueton; I much miss Mousqueton."

"Excellent heart!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, "but believe me, 'twere better you left your horses here, as you left Mousqueton down yonder."

"And why so?"

"Because, some time hence—"

"Well?"

"Well, some time hence, it would perhaps be better that M. Fouquet had never given you any thing."

"I do not understand you," said Porthos.

"It is not necessary that you should."

"And yet—"

"I will explain this to you at a future time, Porthos."

"I would wager it is something political—"

"And of the most recondite."

Porthos hung down his head when he uttered the word "political," and, after a moment's meditation, he added:

"I will acknowledge to you, d'Artagnan, that I am no longer Porthos."

"I know that perfectly well."

"Oh! no one knows that, but you yourself said so to me, you, the bravest of the brave.—"

"What was it that I said to you, Porthos?"

"That a man had his days; you said so to me and I have experienced it; there are days on which we with much less pleasure expose ourselves to receive a musket ball or a good sword thrust."

"That is my idea."

"It is mine, also, although I have little belief in shots or swords that kill."

"The deuse! and yet you have killed many."

"Yes, but I have never been killed."

"Tis a good reason."

"Therefore, I do not believe that I shall ever be killed by the blade of a sword or a ball from a gun."

"Then you are not afraid of any thing—ah! perhaps of water?"

"No, I swim like an otter."

"Of the tertian ague?"

"I have never had it, and do not believe that I ever shall; but I will acknowledge one thing to you."

And Porthos lowered his voice.

"What is it?" inquired d'Artagnan, in the same whispering tone.

"I will acknowledge to you," repeated Porthos, "that I have a most frightful dread of politics."

"Why, really!" exclaimed d'Artagnan.

"Positively!" cried Porthos, in a stentorian voice. "I have seen his eminence the Cardinal de Richelieu and his eminence the Cardinal Mazarin: the politics of the one were red, the politics of the other were black—I never was at all more satisfied with the one than with the other. The first cut off the heads of M. de Mazillac, M. de Thou, M. de Cinq-Mars, M. Chalais, M. Bouteville, M. de Montmorency; the second had a whole host of Frondeurs put to death, and we, my dear friend, were Frondeurs—"

"Which on the contrary we were not."

"Oh! yes, but we were; for though I drew my sword for the cardinal, my blows were struck for the king."

"Dear Porthos!"

"I conclude. My terror of politics is so great, that if there be any thing political under all this I would prefer returning to Pierrefonds."

"You would be right if that were indeed the case; but with me, dear Porthos, there is nothing political—all is straight-forward. You have been engaged in fortifying Belle-Isle—the king wished to know the name of the skilful engineer who had directed the works. You are timid, as is every man of real merit. Perhaps Aramis wished to hide you under a bushel. With me 'tis different. I take you—I declare who you are—I present you—the king rewards you, and there lies all my policy."

"And it is mine, too, by heaven!" cried Porthos, holding out his hand to d'Artagnan.

But d'Artagnan knew too well the hand of Porthos; he well knew that once imprisoned within that ponderous vice, a common hand never escaped from it without a sprain.

He therefore presented not his open hand but his closed fist to the baron.

Porthos did not even perceive this.

After this they both left Saint Mandé.

The porters whispered together a little, and said some words into each other's ears which d'Artagnan fully understood, but which he took good care not to explain to Porthos.

"Our friend," said he to himself, "was purely and simply Aramis's

prisoner. Let us see what the result will be of giving liberty to this conspirator."

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE RAT AND THE CHEESE.

D'ARTAGNAN and Porthos returned to Paris on foot, as d'Artagnan had gone to Saint Mandé.

When d'Artagnan, on entering first into the Golden Pestle, announced to Planchet that M. du Vallon would be one of the privileged travellers—when Porthos, on entering the shop, had with his plume made the wooden candles hung out as a sign rattle against each other, something like a painful presentiment clouded the brow of Planchet as to the happiness he had promised himself for the next day.

But our grocer's heart was a heart of gold, a precious relic of the good old time, which is, and always has been of those who are getting old, the time of their youth, and for those who are young, the later days of their ancestors.

Planchet, notwithstanding that inward shuddering which was repressed as soon as felt, welcomed Porthos with a respect mingled with tender cordiality.

Porthos, somewhat stiff at first, on account of the great distance that existed in those days between a baron and a grocer, Porthos at last became more affable on seeing so much good will and kind attention on the part of Planchet.

He was, above all, very sensible to the liberty which was given, or rather offered to him, to plunge his capacious hands into the boxes of dried and preserved fruits, in the bags of almonds, and nuts, in the drawers full of all sorts of sweetmeats.

Also, notwithstanding Planchet's pressing invitation to go up stairs into the entre-sol, he chose as his favorite resting-place for the five hours he had to pass in Planchet's house the shop which contained all these good things, and where his fingers could always reach that which his nose had scented out.

Beautiful Provence figs, the filberts of Forey, and Touraine plums, became to Porthos a distraction he enjoyed five hours uninterruptedly.

He crushed the stones of the plums, and the nuts and almonds between his teeth with admirable facility, covering the floor with their shells, which crunched beneath the feet of the shop boys as they passed to and fro. Porthos stripped off with his lips, and at a single pull, rich bunches of Muscat raisins of the highest perfume, half a pound of which he would swallow at a single mouthful.

The younger shop boys were crouched down terrified in one corner, looking at each other without daring to speak.

They knew nothing of Porthos; it was the first time they had seen him. The race of those Titans who had borne the cuirass during the times of Hugues Capet, of Philippe Auguste, and Francois I., had almost become extinct. They therefore asked themselves mentally if this was not the Ogre of the Fairy Tales, and whether the whole contents of their master's well stocked shop were to disappear into his insatiable stomach?

While cracking, crushing, breaking, nibbling, sucking and swallowing, Porthos would, from time to time, address the grocer, saying—

"You have a very pretty business here, friend Planchet."

"It will not last very long if this continues," grumbled the first clerk, who had Planchet's promise to leave the business to him.

And in his despair he approached Porthos, who was sitting precisely in the door-way that led from the front shop to the back one. He hoped that Porthos would rise, and that this movement might perhaps put some check on his devouring ideas.

"What do you wish, my friend?" inquired Porthos with an affable air.

"I should wish to pass, sir, if it would not too much inconvenience you."

"That is only right," said Porthos, "and it will not in the least inconvenience me."

And at the same moment he caught the young man by the waist band, raised him from the ground, and gently put him down on the opposite side.

And all this smiling, and with the same affable demeanor.

The young man surprised by this unexpected movement, lost his balance at the moment Porthos put him down. He staggered, and fell backward on a heap of cork.

However, observing the perfect mild-

ness of this giant, he ventured again to address him.

"Ah! sir," cried he, "take care."

"Of what, my friend?" inquired Porthos.

"You will throw yourself into a fever."

"And how so, my friend?" said Porthos.

"All these things are of a very heating nature sir," said the clerk.

"What things?"

"The raisins, nuts, and almonds."

"But if almonds, nuts and raisins are heating—"

"It is incontestible, sir."

"Honey, on the contrary, is cooling."

And stretching out his hand to an open jar of honey, of rare quality, and in which was the spatula with which it was served out to customers, Porthos swallowed a good half pound of it.

"My friend," said Porthos, "I will now ask you for some water."

"In a pail, sir?" innocently inquired the shop man.

"No, in a decanter; a decanter will suffice," replied Porthos, good naturedly.

And raising the decanter to his mouth he emptied it at a single draught.

During this, Planchet trembled in every nerve corresponding with the fibres of property and self-love. However, as a host, worthy to vie in hospitality with hosts of ancient times, he pretended to be conversing with much interest with d'Artagnan, to whom he frequently repeated—

"Ah! sir; what happiness—what joy is this to me!"

"At what hour shall we sup, Planchet?" cried Porthos, "I am beginning to feel hungry."

The first shopman clasped his hands.

The two others hid themselves under the counter, fearing that Porthos might wish to sup on them.

"We will only take a slight collation here," said d'Artagnan, "and when we get to Planchet's country house we will sup there."

"Ah! it is to your country house that we are going, Planchet?" said Porthos, "so much the better."

"You overwhelm me with your kindness, my lord baron."

My lord baron produced a great effect upon the shop lads, who saw a man of the highest rank in this enormous devourer.

Moreover, this title re-assured them,

for they had never heard it said that an ogre was called my lord baron.

"I will take some biscuits for the road," said Porthos, negligently, and saying this he emptied a large glass stand of biscuits, spiced with aniseed, into the vast pocket of his doublet.

"My shop is saved," cried Planchet.

"Yes, like the cheese," said the first shop man.

"What cheese?"

"The Dutch cheese, which a rat got into, and of which we found only the crust."

Planchet looked round his shop, and, seeing what had escaped the teeth of Porthos, he thought the comparison somewhat exaggerated.

The first shopman divined what was passing in his master's mind.

"Beware the return," said he to him.

"You have good fruit at your country place?" inquired Porthos, as they were ascending the stairs to the *entresol*, the servant having informed them that the collation was on table.

"Alas!" thought the grocer, addressing a most supplicating look to d'Artagnan, which the latter comprehended.

Having finished their collation, they mounted their horses, and were soon out of Paris.

They left the capital about six o'clock, and it was late before they reached the pavement of Fontainebleau.

The journey had been performed very joyously. Porthos became much pleased with Planchet's society, because the latter treated him with great respect, and talked to him in high terms of praise of his meadows, his woods and his warrens.

Porthos had the taste and the pride of a landed proprietor.

When d'Artagnan perceived that his two companions were fully engaged in conversation, he went to the opposite side of the road, and letting the rein fall on his horse's neck, he abstracted himself from the world as he had done from Porthos and Planchet.

The moon was shining softly through the dark foliage of the forest. The sweet perfumes from the plain reached the nostrils of the horses, who appeared to bound with joy and snuff it up with delight.

Porthos and Planchet began to talk about the hay-harvest.

Planchet acknowledged to Porthos that in the riper years of his life he

had, in fact, neglected agriculture to devote himself to trade, but that his youth had been spent in Picardy, among its beautiful meadows, where the grass and clover grew as high as his knees, and under the trees of its green orchards, which bore those celebrated red apples; and that he had sworn, as soon as he should have made a competent fortune, to return to his native fields, and there end his days as he had commenced them, as near as possible to that earth to which all men must return.

"Oh! oh! then my dear M. Planchet, your retirement is not far distant," said Porthos.

"How so?" demanded Planchet.

"Why, you appear to me in a good way to make a little fortune."

"I do not deny it," said Planchet, the ball is increasing."

"Tell me, how far extends your ambition, and what is the figure you have made up your mind to, to retire upon, Monsieur Planchet?"

"Sir," said Planchet, without directly replying to the question, interesting as it may be, "there is one thing which causes me much pain."

"And what thing is that?" cried Porthos, looking behind him as if searching for the thing which caused Planchet's anxiety, that he might free him from it.

"In former days," said the worthy grocer, "you used to call me Planchet, without any handle to my name; you then would have said, 'How much do you wish for, Planchet?'"

"Certainly, certainly, in former days I should have spoken in that way," replied Porthos with an embarrassment full of delicacy, "but in former days—"

"In former days I was the lackey of Monsieur d'Artagnan—is it not that you would have said?"

"Yes."

"Well, if I am no longer altogether his lackey, I am still his servant; and, moreover, since that time—"

"Well, Planchet?"

"Since that time I have had the honor of being his partner."

"Oh! oh!" cried Porthos, what, has d'Artagnan entered the grocery business?"

"No, no," said d'Artagnan, whom these words, pronounced in a loud tone by Porthos, had awakened from his revery, and who immediately seized upon the nature of the conversation with that adroitness and rapidity

which distinguished every movement of his mind.

"It was not d'Artagnan who entered into the grocery business, but Planchet who thought proper to engage in politics—that was it."

"Yes," said Planchet, with pride and satisfaction, "we entered into a little operation, which netted me a hundred thousand livres, and two hundred thousand to M. d'Artagnan."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Porthos with admiration.

"So that, my lord baron, I again entreat you to call me Planchet, quite short; you do not know the pleasure it will give me."

"I will then, if such be your wish, my dear Planchet," replied Porthos.

And, as he was close to Planchet, he raised his hand to clap him on the shoulder, as a sign of cordial friendship.

But a providential movement of his horse deranged the aim of the cavalier, so that his hand fell on the croup of Planchet's horse.

The animal bent beneath the blow.

D'Artagnan began to laugh and called aloud.

"Take care, Planchet, if Porthos loves you too much, he will crush you; and if he caresses you he will certainly flatten you. Porthos, do you see, is still as strong as ever."

"Oh!" said Planchet, "Mousqueton has not been killed by him yet, and yet the baron loves him much."

"Certainly," cried Porthos, with a sigh, which made the three horses start simultaneously, "and it was only this morning I was saying to d'Artagnan how much I regret him; but tell me, Planchet—"

"Thanks, Monsieur le Baron, thanks!"

"Worthy fellow!—How many acres of park, have you?"

"Of park?"

"Yes, we will talk of the meadows afterwards, and the woods—"

"And where, sir?"

"At your country seat."

"But, Baron du Vallon, I have neither country seat nor park, nor meadows, nor woods—"

"What have you then? Why then do you call it a country seat?"

"I did not call it a country seat," repeated Planchet, somewhat humiliated, "but only a mere lodging place—"

"Ah! ah!" said Porthos, "I understand you! you wish to surprise us."

"No, my lord baron, I am speaking the whole truth—I have two spare rooms for friends, and that is all."

"But then where are your friends to walk—"

"First of all in the king's forest, which is very beautiful."

"The fact is, the forest is very fine, almost as fine as my forest in Berry."

Planchet opened his eyes widely.

"You have a forest like the forest of Fontainebleau, my lord baron?" stammered he.

"Yes, I have even two, but that in Berry is my favorite."

"And for what reason?" inquired Planchet whose curiosity was much excited.

"Because I do not know the limits of it, and for another reason, because it is full of poachers."

"And how is it that this profusion of poachers, renders this forest so particularly agreeable to you?"

"Because they chase my game, and I in turn chase them; which in time of peace is in my eyes, though in minor degree, a sort of warfare."

They were at this point of the conversation, when Planchet, raising his eyes, perceived the first house of Fontainebleau, standing out in bold relief from the starry sky, while above the compact though informal mass, arose the sharp pointed roofs of the palace, the tiles of which glistened in the moonlight like the scales of an immense fish.

"Gentlemen," said Planchet, "I have the honor to announce to you that we have arrived at Fontainebleau."

CHAPTER LXVII.

PLANCHET'S COUNTRY HOUSE.

THE cavaliers raised their heads and saw that honest Planchet was perfectly correct in his information.

Ten minutes afterwards they were in the rue de Lyon, on the further side of the Beautiful Peacock Inn.

A high hedge of thick elder bushes, hawthorn and hops formed an impenetrable and dark inclosure, behind which rose a white house with a high tiled roof.

Two of the windows of this house opened upon the street.

There was no light in either of them.

"Between the two was a small door

surmounted by a portico supported by pilasters formed the entrance to the house.

You reached this door by a high step.

Planchet alighted from his horse as if about to knock at this door, then, recollecting himself he took his horse by the bridle and walked about thirty paces farther.

His two companions followed him.

They then arrived before a grated carriage gate and raising a wooden latch the only fastening to this gate, he pushed open one side of it.

Then he entered it first, leading his horse by the bridle into a small courtyard surrounded by manure, whose wholesome odor gave promise of a neighboring stable.

"How nice it smells," said Porthos loudly, alighting in his turn, "and I could really imagine myself near my cowhouse at Pierrefonds."

"I have but one now," hastily but modestly observed Planchet.

"And I have thirty," said Porthos, "or rather I do not know how many I may have."

The two cavaliers having entered the court-yard, Planchet closed the gate.

During this time d'Artagnan who had alighted from his horse with his usual activity, inhaled the good air, and joyous as a Parisian when he sees green shrubs, he broke off a slip of honeysuckle with one hand and some eglantine with the other.

Porthos had fallen in with some peas which were growing up some sticks and was eating or rather browsing on them, shells and all.

Planchet had gone into a shed and was busy waking up a sort of country-groom, old and broken down, who was sleeping upon moss on which was spread a linen frock.

This countryman on recognizing Planchet called him, "our master," to the great satisfaction of the grocer.

"Tie the horses up to the manger, old boy," said Planchet, "and feed them well."

"Oh! that I will! what fine cattle," said the countryman, "oh! they shall have enough to burst them."

"Gently, gently, my friend," cried d'Artagnan; "the deuse! how fast we go. Some oats and a bundle of straw, but nothing more."

"And give my horse a wash," said Porthos, "for it seems to me, he is rather warm."

"Oh! fear nothing, gentlemen,"

replied Planchet, "for father Celestin is an old gen d'arme from Ivry. He understands horses thoroughly. Come with me to the house."

And he led the two friends through a covered walk which crossed a kitchen garden, then a small piece of luzerne, and terminating in a small flower-garden, behind which rose the house of which they had seen the principal front towards the street.

As they approached they could distinguish through two open windows on the ground floor, and which gave access to the room, the interior, the *penetratia* of Planchet.

This room, softly illuminated by a lamp standing on a table, appeared from the end of the garden like the smiling image of tranquillity, of ease and happiness.

Wherever a ray of light, detached from this luminous centre, fell upon some piece of antique porcelain, upon a piece of furniture shining with cleanliness, upon a weapon hanging against the tapestry, the pure light met with a reflection, and reposed, as it were, on some object agreeable to the eye.

This lamp which illuminated the room, while the foliage of jessamines and passion-flowers fell in graceful wreaths from the casings of the windows, also illuminated splendidly a damask table-cloth, white as the driven snow.

The table had been laid for two persons. A tawny colored wine sparkled like rubies through a long necked and brilliantly cut glass decanter, and a large jug of blue porcelain with a silver cover contained some creaming cider.

Near the table, in an arm-chair with a high back, was a woman about thirty years of age, whose face bloomed with health and freshness; she was sleeping.

And on the knees of this rosy creature was lying a large tabby cat, rolled up, as it were, into a ball, with its four feet under it, purring, with half-closed eyes, in the characteristic manner of the feline species, and saying almost as clearly as could be expressed by words, "I am perfectly happy."

The two friends paused before the open window, stupified with surprise.

On observing their astonishment, Planchet was highly gratified.

"Ah! Planchet, you rogue," cried d'Artagnan, "I can now understand your periodical absence."

"Ho! ho! what beau fully white linen!" cried Porthos, in a voice of thunder.

At the first sound of that stentorian voice the cat fled with terror, the handsome housekeeper awoke with a start, and Planchet, assuming a most gracious air, introduced his two friends into the room in which the table was prepared.

"Permit me, my dear," said he, "to present to you the Chevalier d'Artagnan, my protector."

D'Artagnan took the lady's hand and kissed it with the same chivalric courtesy that he would have done had it been the hand of Madame.

"This gentleman is the Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds," added Planchet.

Porthos saluted the lady in a manner which would have been satisfactory even to Anne of Austria, or she would have been very exacting.

Then came Planchet's own turn.

He kissed the lady in good earnest, after, however, having made a sign to d'Artagnan and Porthos by which he appeared to request their permission—a permission which, it will be readily imagined, was at once granted.

D'Artagnan congratulated Planchet.

"Here is a man," continued he, "who really understands how to enjoy life."

"Sir," replied Planchet, laughing, "life is a capital which we must lay out to the best advantage."

"And you manage to make it pay you a high rate of interest," said Porthos, laughing with deafening boisterousness.

Planchet again addressed his housekeeper.

"My dear friend," said he, "I followed these two gentlemen for many years. I have frequently spoken to you of both of them."

"And two others besides," said the lady with a furiously strong Flemish accent.

"This lady is from Holland, I conceive?" said d'Artagnan, inquiringly.

Porthos was twirling his moustache, which d'Artagnan remarked, for he remarked every thing.

"I am from Antwerp, sir," replied the lady.

"And she is called Dame Gechter," said Planchet.

"But you do not call madame so?" observed d'Artagnan.

"And why not?" inquired Planchet.

"Because it sounds too old."

"No; I call her Trüdchen.*

"A charming name!" exclaimed Porthos.

"Trüdchen," said Planchet, "arrived from Flanders with her virtue and two thousand florins. She was escaping from a tyrannical husband, who used to beat her. As a Picard I always had an affection for the women of Artois. From Artois into Flanders is but a step. She came weeping to the house of her god-father, who was my predecessor in the rue des Lombards; she placed in my hands her two thousand florins, which I have managed so that they have now increased to ten thousand."

"Bravo! Planchet!"

"She is free, she is rich: she has a cow, she has a woman servant, and papa Celestin, at her command. She spins all the flax of which my shirts are made, and she knits all my winter stockings; she sees me only once a fortnight, and she is pleased to consider herself happy."

"And happy I really am," cried Trüdchen, with unfeigned satisfaction.

Porthos twirled the other side of his moustache.

"The deuse! the deuse!" thought d'Artagnan, "can Porthos already have formed pretensions!"

In the mean time Trüdchen, clearly understanding that the gentlemen were going to sup there, had hurried on her cook-maid, had prepared the places for the two guests, and loaded the table with exquisite viands, which of a supper at once makes a grand repast, and of a repast a complete feast.

Fresh butter, hung beef, anchovies and pickled tunny, all the delicacies from Planchet's shop ornamented the sides and corners of the table.

The more solid dishes were, fowls, river fish, pond fish, game from the forest, asparagus, artichokes, salad, and other vegetables—in fact all the resources of the country were laid under contribution.

Moreover, Planchet had made an excursion to his cellar, from whence he returned loaded with ten bottles, the glass of which was imperceptible from a thick layer of gray dust.

All this delighted the heart of Porthos.

"I am hungry," said he.

And he seated himself by the side

* Trudchen is the familiar diminutive of Gertrude.—TRANS.

of Madame Trüdchen, darting at her a most assassinating glance.

D'Artagnan seated himself on the other side of the lady.

Planchet discreetly and joyfully sat down opposite to her.

"Do not be surprised," said he, "if during the supper Trüdchen should often leave the table; she has to look after your sleeping rooms."

And in fact the housekeeper was constantly moving to and fro, and the guests could hear the bedsteads cracking and the castors, on which they stood, rolling over the tiled floors of the rooms above them.

During this time the three men were eating and drinking joyously, Porthos above all.

It was really marvellous to see them.

The ten bottles had become mere ghosts when Trüdchen came down stairs, bringing with her a Rocquefort cheese.

D'Artagnan had retained all his dignity.

Porthos, on the contrary, had lost the greater part of his.

They sang old soldier songs, and talked with most remarkable volubility.

D'Artagnan proposed another journey to the cellar; and as Planchet did not walk with all the steadiness of a well drilled foot soldier, the captain of the mousquetaires proposed to accompany him.

They therefore set out together, singing and bawling in a way to frighten old Nick himself.

Trüdchen remained at table, sitting beside Porthos.

While the two epicures were selecting the wine deposited behind the wood in the cellar, there could be heard that sharp, sonorous sound produced by two lips forming a vacuum on a cheek.

"Porthos imagines himself at la Rochelle," thought d'Artagnan.

They came up stairs again loaded with bottles.

Planchet sang so much he could no longer see.

D'Artagnan, whom nothing ever escaped, saw that Trüdchen's left cheek was much redder than the right.

Nqw, Porthos sat smiling on Trüdchen's left hand, and was twirling both his moustaches at the same time.

Trüdchen smiled also at the magnificent lord.

The sparkling Anjou wine metamorphosed these men first into three devils and afterwards into three logs.

D'Artagnan had only sense enough left to seize a taper and light Planchet up his own staircase.

Planchet was dragging Porthos, who was pushed on by Trüdchen, the latter being also very jovial.

It was d'Artagnan who found out the bed-rooms and managed to discover the beds.

Porthos plunged into his after being undressed by his friend the mousquetaire.

D'Artagnan threw himself upon his, saying, '*Mordious*;' and yet I had sworn never again to touch that treacherous yellow wine. Fie! if the mousquetaires should see their captain in such a state as this!"

And, drawing the curtains round his bed—

"But fortunately they will not see me," added he.

Planchet was carried off by Trüdchen, in her arms, who undressed him and closed doors and windows.

"The country is really most amusing," said Porthos, stretching himself in his bed, and with such violence that his feet broke through the foot-board of the bed with a tremendous crash, but to which no one paid attention, so much had all enjoyed themselves in Planchet's country house. At two in the morning all its inhabitants were snoring most sonorously.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

WHAT COULD BE SEEN FROM PLANCHET'S HOUSE.

THE three heroes were sleeping soundly long after most of the inhabitants of Fontainebleau had risen.

Trüdchen had closed the shutters, fearing their heavy eyes might be inconvenienced by the first rays of the rising sun.

It was still dark night beneath Porthos' curtains, and Planchet's tester when d'Artagnan, first awakened by an indiscreet gleam of sunshine penetrating through a chink in the window-shutter, jumped out of bed as if anxious to be the first at the assault.

He at once invaded Porthos' room which was the next to his own.

The worthy Porthos was sleeping as the thunder growls. His gigantic bust was displayed in the semi darkness, and his hand, swelled from its pendant

position, was hanging out of bed, almost touching the carpet.

D'Artagnan awakened Porthos, who rubbed his eyes with tolerable good humor.

During this time Planchet was dressing himself, and came to the room of his two guests, still staggering from the previous night's excess, to inquire after their healths.

Although it was still early, the servants were up and doing.

The cook was committing murder right and left in the poultry yard; old Celestin was gathering cherries in the garden.

Porthos, merry as a lark, held out his hand to Planchet, and d'Artagnan asked permission to embrace Madame Trüdchen.

The latter, who felt no ill will towards the vanquished, approached Porthos, to whom the same favor was granted.

Porthos embraced Madame Trüdchen, heaving a deep sigh.

Then Planchet took the two friends by the hand.

"I will now show you over the house," said he; "last night we came in when it was quite dark, and could consequently see nothing. But in daylight every thing changes its appearance, and you will be well pleased."

"Let us begin by the view," said d'Artagnan, "a fine view delights me beyond every thing. I have always inhabited royal residences, and princes know pretty well how to select a picturesque position."

"As to myself," said Porthos, "I have always delighted in a fine view. On my estate at Pierrefonds I had four avenues cut through the woods, each terminating in a beautiful perspective, all various in their way."

"You shall see my perspective," said Planchet.

And he led his two guests to a window.

"Ah! yes," cried d'Artagnan, "that is the rue de Lyon."

"Yes, I have two windows here; the view is not very good. From them you perceive that inn where there is always great noise and bustle. It is a disagreeable neighborhood. I had four windows on this side, but I closed up two of them."

"Let us go on," said d'Artagnan.

They then went into a passage leading to other rooms, and Planchet threw open the shutters.

"Well, well," cried Porthos, "what is that yonder?"

"The forest," replied Planchet; "it is our horizon, always a thick line of green, which is somewhat yellow in spring, green in summer, red in autumn, and white in winter."

"Very well; but it is a curtain which prevents your seeing further."

"Yes," said Planchet; "but from here to this curtain, as you call it, one can see."

"Ah! those large fields," said Porthos.

"Well, now, what is it I see there, crosses, stones—"

"Ah! why that is the cemetery," cried d'Artagnan.

"Precisely," said Planchet, "and I assure you it is very curious. Not a day passes but some one is buried there. Fontainebleau is very populous. Sometimes we see young girls dressed in white bearing banners; at others the aldermen or rich citizens with the chanters and the clergy of the parish, sometimes officers of the king's household."

"As to me, I do not like that," said Porthos.

"It is by no means amusing," observed d'Artagnan.

"But I can assure you it inspires holy thoughts," replied Planchet.

"Oh! I do not deny that."

"But," continued Planchet, "we must die one day, and there is in some book a maxim which I recollect. This is it: 'the thought of death is a salutary thought.'"

"I do not assert the contrary," said Porthos.

"But," remarked d'Artagnan, "salutary thoughts arise also from the sight of the green fields, and flowers, and rivers, from blue horizons, and from boundless plains."

"If I had such before me, I would not reject them," said Planchet, "but having only this small cemetery, in which there are flowers and moss, shade and tranquillity, I am contented with it, and I think of the people in the city who live in the rue des Lombards for instance, and who hear two thousand carts rattling along every day, and who see a hundred and fifty thousand persons wading through the muddy streets."

"But they are living persons," cried Porthos, "they are alive."

"And that is precisely why," replied Planchet, "it tranquillizes me to see a little of death."

"This confounded Planchet," said d'Artagnan, "he was born to be a poet as well as a grocer."

"Sir," said Planchet, "I am one of those men whom God has kneaded of such a paste, destined to be animated during a certain time, that they find every thing good that accompanies their sojourn upon earth."

D'Artagnan seated himself near the window and Planchet's philosophy appearing to him sound, he meditated on it.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Porthos, "they are now giving us a touch of the comedy. Do I not hear some one chanting?"

"Why, yes, they are chanting," said d'Artagnan.

"Oh! it is a funeral of the lowest class," said Planchet disdainfully. "There is only the officiating priest, the beadle, and one chorister. You see gentlemen, that the defunct could not be a prince."

"No; there is no one following the coffin."

"Yes, there is," said Porthos, "I see a man."

"That is true, a man wrapped up in a cloak," said d'Artagnan.

"It is not worth the trouble of looking at it," said Planchet.

"It interests me," replied d'Artagnan, placing both his elbows on the window sill.

"Come, come, you are nibbling already," said Planchet with much delight, "it was exactly so with me, during the first few days it made me quite melancholy to be making the sign of the cross all day long, and their chants affected my head as if nails were being driven into it; but now, these chants soothe me, and I have never seen prettier birds than those of this cemetery."

"As to me," said Porthos, "it no longer amuses me; I would rather go down stairs."

Planchet immediately sprang forward, and offered his arm to Porthos to take him into the garden.

"What! do you intend to remain here?" said Porthos to d'Artagnan, turning round.

"Yes, my friend, yes, but I will join you presently."

"Ah! ah! M. d'Artagnan is right," said Planchet, "are they lowering the coffin?"

"Not yet."

"Ah! yes, the sexton is waiting till

the cords are knotted round it—but see, there is a woman coming in at the further end of the cemetery."

"Yes, yes, dear Planchet," impatiently replied d'Artagnan, "but leave me, leave me, I am beginning to enter into salutary meditations, do not disturb me."

Planchet followed Porthos, d'Artagnan, from behind his half closed shutter, was devouring with his eyes every movement made in the cemetery.

The two bearers of the corpse had detached the straps from the bier, and were lowering their burden into the grave.

The man in the cloak, the only spectator of this lugubrious spectacle, was standing at the distance of a few paces, leaning against a large cypress tree, and completely concealed his face from the grave-diggers and priests; the body of the defunct was buried in five minutes.

The grave being filled, the priests returned towards the church, the grave-digger said some few words to them, and then followed them.

The man in the cloak bowed to them as they passed, and put a piece of money into the grave-digger's hand.

"*Mordoux!*" murmured d'Artagnan, "why that man is Aramis!"

And in fact Aramis being alone, no longer concealed his face, but he had scarcely turned his head when the steps of a woman and the rustling of a gown were heard upon the path near him.

He immediately turned round and took off his hat with all the ceremonious respect of a courtier, he led the lady under the shade of some chestnut and linden trees, which had been planted near a magnificent tomb.

"Ah! a pretty thing truly," said d'Artagnan, "the bishop of Vannes giving a rendezvous! he is still the abbé Aramis flirting at Noisy-le-See."

"Yes," added the mousquetaire, "but in a cemetery it must be a holy rendezvous," and he laughed at the idea.

The conversation was continued during a good half hour.

D'Artagnan could not see the lady's face, for her back was turned to him, but he saw clearly by the rigid demeanor of the two interlocutors, by the measured stiffness of their gestures, the constrained movement of their heads that they were not speaking of love.

When the conversation had terminated the lady rose, and it was she

who had made a profound reverence to Aramis.

"Oh! oh!" thought d'Artagnan, "why this ends like a love rendezvous after all!—the cavalier kneels at the commencement of it; the damsel is afterwards completely subjugated and then it is her turn to supplicate—but who can this damsel be? I would give one of my nails to see her."

But it was impossible; Aramis was the first to leave the cemetery; the lady drew her hood over her face and then went away.

D'Artagnan could no longer restrain his curiosity; he ran to the window that opened on the rue de Lyon.

Aramis had just gone into the inn.

The lady was proceeding in an opposite direction. She was probably going to rejoin a carriage with two horses which could be seen waiting on the border of the wood.

She was walking slowly, her head cast down, apparently absorbed in deep revery.

"Mordieux! Mordieux! I must know who that woman is," again said the mousquetaire.

And without further deliberation he set off in pursuit of her.

As he went along, he asked himself what plan he should adopt to make her raise her veil.

"She is not young," said he, "she is a woman of high rank. I know, or may the d—l fly away with me, that form!"

As he ran along the noise of his spurs and his riding boots on the hard road made a strange jingling, and a fortunate accident occurred on which he had not calculated.

This noise had alarmed the lady, she thought she was followed or pursued, and which was true, and she turned round.

D'Artagnan jumped as if he had received a charge of sparrow shot in the calves of his legs, then made an oblique movement to return to the house.

"Madame de Cheureuse!" murmured he.

But d'Artagnan would not return to the house before having acquired every possible information.

He requested old Celestin to inquire of the grave-diggers who it was that had been buried that morning. The grave-diggers answer was: "A poor Franciscan mendicant, who had not even a dog to love him in this world or to escort him to his last home."

"Were this the case," thought d'Artagnan, "Aramis would not have attended the funeral. His grace the bishop of Vannes is not a dog in regard to devotedness; as to scent, I will not say so!"

CHAPTER LXIX.

HOW PORTHOS, TRÜDCHEN AND PLANCHET PARTED GOOD FRIENDS, THANKS TO D'ARTAGNAN.

THEY fared sumptuously in worthy Planchet's house.

Porthos broke down a ladder and two cherry-trees, ravaged the raspberry beds, but could not manage to stoop down to the strawberries on account, as he said, of his belt.

Trüdchen, who was already on good terms with her guest, replied—

"Tish nod te pelt but someting else—"

And Porthos, overjoyed, embraced Trüdchen, who gathered for him a handful of strawberries, and made him eat them out of her hand. D'Artagnan, who came in while all this was going on, scolded Porthos for his laziness, and pitied poor Planchet.

Porthos made a good breakfast; when he had finished it—

"I could be well pleased to live here," said he, looking at Trüdchen.

Trüdchen smiled.

Planchet smiled also, though not without some slight degree of embarrassment.

Then d'Artagnan said to Porthos—

"You must not, my dear friend, allow the delights of Capua to make you forget the real object of your visit to Fontainebleau."

"My presentation to the king?"

"Precisely; I will just take a turn to the palace to arrange this matter. But do not go out of the house, I beg of you."

"Oh! certainly not!" cried Porthos.

Planchet looked at d'Artagnan with some degree of apprehension.

"Do you think you will be long absent?" he inquired.

"No, my friend," replied d'Artagnan, "and this evening I will relieve you from the burden of two guests who weigh rather heavily upon you."

"Oh! sir, can you imagine—"

"No, but, do you see, you have an

excellent heart, your house is small. There are men who have but two acres, and yet could receive a king and make him happy. But you are not a great lord, you—"

"Nor is M. Porthos neither," murmured Planchet.

"He has become so, my dear friend; he is sovereign of an income of a hundred thousand livres for the last twenty years, and for fifty he has been sovereign of two fists and shoulders which have never been rivalled in the great kingdom of France. Porthos, in comparison with you, is a great lord, and, my son, I need not say more to you—you are intelligent—"

"But no! but no! pray, sir, explain this to me."

"Look at your ravaged orchard, your empty meat-safe, your spare bed broken down, your devastated cellar—look at Madame Trüdchen—"

Porthos and Trüdchen had gone down into the garden.

"Ah! good heaven!" cried Planchet.

"Porthos, do you see," continued d'Artagnan, "is lord of thirty villages, which contain at the least three hundred very pretty female vassals, and Porthos is a very handsome man."

"Ah! good heaven!" repeated Planchet.

"Madame Trüdchen is a most excellent person," pursued d'Artagnan, "keep her for yourself—do you understand me?"

And d'Artagnan clapped Planchet on the shoulder.

At this moment the grocer perceived Trüdchen and Porthos at some distance, under a covered walk.

Trüdchen, with perfectly Flemish grace, was putting on Porthos' ears some double cherries, forming ear-rings for him, and Porthos was smiling amorously as did Samson before Dalilah.

Planchet grasped d'Artagnan's hand and then ran in great trepidation to the covered walk.

We must do Porthos the justice to say, that he did not appear in the slightest degree put out by Planchet's arrival—undoubtedly he did not think he was doing any harm.

Neither did Trüdchen appear at all confused, but this disconcerted Planchet so much the more; he had, however, seen enough of the great-world in his shop not to put on a good face despite the annoyance that he felt.

Planchet took Porthos by the arm

and asked him to go with him to see the horses.

Porthos excused himself, saying he was tired.

Planchet proposed to the Baron de Vallon to return with him to the house to taste some Noyau, made by himself, which he said had not its equal in the world.

Porthos agreed to this.

And thus during the whole morning did Planchet occupy his enemy. He sacrificed his most precious stores to his self-love.

D'Artagnan returned in about two hours.

"All is arranged," said he; "I saw his majesty for a moment, before his setting out for the chase: the king expects us this evening."

"The king expects me!" cried Porthos, drawing himself up.

And it must be avowed, for such a treacherous wave is the heart of man, that from that moment Porthos no longer looked upon Madame Trüdchen with that touching grace which had mollified the heart of the fair Antwerpian.

Planchet did all he could to heighten these ambitious feelings. He related or rather passed in review all the splendors of the preceding reign; the battles fought, the sieges and all its ceremonies. He spoke of the wealth of the English, the rich windfalls the three brave companions had gathered, and of whom d'Artagnan, from having been at first the humblest, had become the chief.

He rendered Porthos perfectly enthusiastic by recounting his feats in former days; he vaunted, as he best could, the chastity of the great lord, and his religious observance of the rights of friendship: he was not only eloquent, but skilful. He charmed Porthos, made Trüdchen tremble, and made d'Artagnan meditate.

At six o'clock the mousquetaire ordered the horses to be saddled, and made Porthos dress himself.

He thanked Planchet for his cordial hospitality, slipped in some vague words of an office which might be found for him at court, and which immediately raised Planchet in the eyes of Trüdchen, in which the poor grocer, though so good, so generous, and so devoted, had been losing ground since the arrival of the two great lords, with whom a comparison was disadvantageous to him.

For women are thus constituted: they are always ambitious of that which they do not possess; and, once attained, they disdain that which was before the great object of their ambition.

After having rendered this service to his friend Planchet, d'Artagnan drew Porthos aside, and said to him:

"My friend, that is a pretty ring you have upon your finger."

"It cost three hundred pistoles," said Porthos.

Madame Trüdchen would remember you much better if you would leave that ring with her," continued d'Artagnan.

Porthos hesitated.

"You think that it is not sufficiently valuable to offer her," said the mousquetaire; "I understand your feelings fully: you think that a great nobleman, like you, cannot lodge in the house of an old servant without largely repaying his hospitality; but, believe me, Planchet has so good a heart, that he will not remember that you have an income of a hundred thousand livres."

"I have a great mind," said Porthos, puffed up by this flattering discourse, "to give Madame Trüdchen my little farm at Bracieux: that also would be a pretty finger ring—twelve acres."

"That would be too much, my good Porthos; keep that for another opportunity."

He took the diamond from his finger, and going up to Trüdchen:

"Madam," said he, "his lordship the baron knows not how to beg of you to accept, in remembrance of him, this small ring. M. du Vallon is one of the most generous and most discreet men that I have ever known. He wished to offer you a small farm which he possesses at Bracieux, but from this I dissuaded him."

"Oh!" cried Trüdchen, devouring the diamond with her eyes.

"My lord baron!" cried Planchet, much affected.

"My good friend!" stammered Porthos, delighted at having been so well interpreted by d'Artagnan.

All these exclamations crossing each other formed quite a pathetic winding up to the day, which might have ended in a much more grotesque manner.

But d'Artagnan was there; and every where when d'Artagnan commanded, things were compelled to take the turn which his taste or his will directed.

They all embraced. Trüdchen, reduced to her proper station by the munificence of the baron, felt her inferiority, and timidly offered but her blushing cheek to the salute of the great nobleman with whom she had been only just before on terms of such familiarity.

Planchet himself was penetrated with humility.

Being once in a generous vein, Porthos would have emptied the contents of his pockets into the hands of Papa Celestin and the cook.

But d'Artagnan stopped him.

"It is now my turn," said he.

And he gave a pistol to the woman and two to the old man.

The benedictions they bestowed would have rejoiced the heart even of Harpagon, and have rendered him prodigal.

D'Artagnan made Planchet accompany them to the palace, and introduced Porthos into his apartments of captain of the mousquetaires without his having been seen by those he feared that he might meet.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE PRESENTATION OF PORTHOS.

THE same evening, at seven o'clock, the king gave audience to an ambassador from the United Provinces in the grand receiving room.

The audience lasted about a quarter of an hour, after which the king received persons who were presented to him for the first time, among whom were several ladies, who were presented first.

In one corner of the saloon, and behind a massive column, not far distant from the canopy under which the king was seated, Porthos and d'Artagnan were conversing while waiting their turn.

"Have you heard the news?" said the mousquetaire to his friend.

"No."

"Well then look there."

Porthos raised himself on the tips of his toes, and above the heads of the courtiers surrounding the throne, saw M. Fouquet in full dress, who was leading Aramis to present him to the king.

"Aramis!" cried Porthos.

"And presented to the king by M. Fouquet."

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos.

"For having fortified Belle-Isle," continued d'Artagnan.

"And I?"

"You, you as I had the honor to tell you, you are the good Porthos, the heart of honey, and therefore were you requested to keep guard at Saint Mandé."

"Ah!" repeated Porthos.

"But I am here, fortunately," said d'Artagnan, "and it will be my turn presently."

At that moment Fouquet was addressing the king.

"Sire," said he, "I have a favor to ask of your majesty. M. d'Herblay is not ambitious, but he knows that he might be useful. Your majesty stands in need of an agent at Rome, and that agent should be a man of powerful talent. We can have a cardinal's hat for M. d'Herblay."

The king made a gesture of surprise.

"It is not often that I ask any thing of your majesty."

"It is a case," replied the king, which was his usual formula when hesitating to grant any request.

These words once uttered no one could offer any further observation.

Fouquet and Aramis looked at each other.

The king rejoined—

"M. d'Herblay can also be useful to us in France, an archbishopric for instance."

"Sire," objected Fouquet, with that grace which was peculiar to him, "your majesty's generosity overwhelms M. d'Herblay; the archbishopric may, by the king's grace, be added to the hat, the one does not exclude the other."

The king admired this presence of mind, and smiled.

"D'Artagnan could not have replied better," said he.

He had no sooner pronounced these words than d'Artagnan appeared.

"Did your majesty call me?" said he.

Aramis and Fouquet retreated one step, and were about to take leave.

"Permit me, sire," eagerly said d'Artagnan, and at the same time making a sign to Porthos to advance from behind his column, "permit me, sire, to present to your majesty the Baron du Vallon, one of the bravest gentlemen in France."

On seeing Porthos, Aramis turned pale.

Fouquet clenched his hands beneath his ruffles.

D'Artagnan smiled at both of them, while Porthos was bowing, evidently in much emotion, before his royal majesty.

"Porthos here!" murmured Fouquet into the ear of Aramis.

"Hush! some treachery!" replied the latter.

"Sire," said d'Artagnan, "I ought to have presented Monsieur du Vallon to your majesty six years ago, but there are men who are similar to the stars; they only appear surrounded by their friends. The Pleiades are never disunited, and that is the reason why I have selected, in order to present Monsieur du Vallon, the moment when your majesty would see beside him Monsieur d'Herblay."

Aramis appeared to lose his self-possession; but soon recovering himself he looked at d'Artagnan with an air of superb defiance as if accepting the challenge which he had thrown down to him.

"Ah! these gentlemen are good friends," said the king.

"Excellent, sire, and the one would be responsible for the other. Ask M. de Vannes how Belle-Isle was fortified."

Fouquet stepped back one pace.

"Belle-Isle," replied Aramis, coldly, "was fortified by that gentleman."

And he pointed to Porthos who bowed a second time.

Louis looked on admiringly though mistrustfully.

"Yes," said d'Artagnan, "but ask the baron who it was assisted him in these labors."

"Aramis," frankly replied Porthos. And he pointed to the bishop.

"What the deuce can be the meaning of all this?" thought the bishop, "and what will be the winding up of this comedy."

"What!" cried the king, "Monsieur the cardinal—the bishop, I mean to say—his name is Aramis."

"A war name," said d'Artagnan.

"A name given among friends," said Aramis.

"No modesty," exclaimed d'Artagnan, "beneath those priestly robes, sire, is concealed the most brilliant of officers, the most intrepid gentleman, the most learned theologian of your kingdom."

Louis raised his head.

"And an engineer?" said he, admiring the really admirable physiognomy of Aramis, for at that moment it was resplendent.

"An engineer upon occasion, sire," said the latter.

"My companion in the mousquetaires," rejoined d'Artagnan with generous warmth, "a man whose counsels have more than a hundred times aided the designs of your father's minister. In a word, M. d'Herblay, with M. du Vallon, myself and the Count de la Fère, well known to your majesty, formed the quartette which many people spoke of under the late king and during your minority."

"And who has fortified Belle-Isle?" inquired the king with profound interest. Aramis smiled.

"To serve the son," said he, "as I had served the father."

D'Artagnan minutely watched Aramis while he was proffering these words. He evinced in them such a feeling of true respect, such warm devotedness, such incontestable conviction, that he, d'Artagnan, the eternal doubter, the infallible, was deceived by it.

"A man has not such an accent when he lies," said he to himself.

Louis was much affected by it.

"In that case," said the king to Fouquet, who was awaiting with great anxiety the result of this trial, "the hat is granted; M. d'Herblay, you have my word for the first promotion. Thank M. Fouquet."

These words were heard by Colbert whose heart was torn by them.

And he precipitately left the drawing-room.

"You, Monsieur du Vallon, ask in your turn," said the king, "I feel delight in rewarding the servants of my father."

"Sire," said Porthos, but he could get no farther.

"Sire," cried d'Artagnan, "this worthy nobleman is confused by the majesty of your person, he who has boldly sustained the looks and the fire of a thousand enemies; but I know his thoughts, and I who am more accustomed to gazing at the sun, I will translate his thoughts. He demands nothing, he only desires the happiness of contemplating your majesty, during a quarter of an hour."

"You will say with me this evening,"

said the king saluting Porthos with a gracious smile.

Porthos became absolutely purple with joy and pride.

The king then dismissed him, and d'Artagnan pushed him behind the column where he embraced him.

"Manage to sit next to me at table," whispered Porthos into his ear.

"I will, my friend."

"Aramis is angry with me, is he not?"

"Aramis never loved you half so much, reflect only, that I have just insured a cardinal's hat for him."

"That is true," replied Porthos. "By-the-by, tell me, does the king like to see one eat much at his table?"

"You could not flatter him more, for he himself, has a most royal appetite."

"You delight me," said Porthos.

CHAPTER LXXI.

EXPLANATIONS.

ARAMIS had so skilfully converted d'Artagnan that he ventured to go in search of him and Porthos.

He approached the latter behind the pillar and pressing his hand:

"You have escaped from my prison," said he to him.

"Do not scold him," said d'Artagnan, "it was I who opened his prison doors."

"Ah! my friend," continued Aramis, looking at Porthos, "were you becoming impatient?"

D'Artagnan again came to Porthos' assistance who was much confused.

"You men of the church," said he to Aramis, "you are great politicians; we men of the sword, go straight to the point at once. I will tell you exactly how it happened, I had gone to pay a visit to our dear Baisemeaux."

Aramis pricked up his ears.

"Ah!" cried Porthos, "that reminds me that I have a letter from Baisemeaux for you, Aramis."

And Porthos handed the bishop the letter of which we have before spoken.

Aramis asked permission to read it, which he did, while d'Artagnan on his side did not appear in the slightest degree disconcerted by this circumstance which he had followed up so closely.

Moreover, Aramis himself appeared

so perfectly unconcerned that d'Artagnan admired him more than ever.

Having read the letter Aramis put it into his pocket with perfect calmness.

"You were saying, dear captain?" said he.

"I was saying," continued the mousquetaire, "that I had gone to visit Baisemeaux on service—"

"On service?" inquired Aramis.

"Yes," replied d'Artagnan, "and naturally we spoke of you and of our friends. I cannot avoid observing that Baisemeaux received me coldly; I took leave of him, and as I was returning, a soldier came up to me and said, (he recognized me no doubt, although I was in plain clothes) 'captain, will you oblige me by reading the name upon this envelope,' and I read: 'To M. du Vallon, at Saint Mandé at M. Fouquet's.'"

"By heaven!" said I to myself Porthos has not returned to Pierrefonds or Belle-Isle as I had thought—Porthos is at M. Fouquet's house, at Saint Mandé. M. Fouquet is not at Saint Mandé! Porthos is therefore either alone or with Aramis, let us go and see Porthos, And therefore I went to see Porthos."

"Very well," said Aramis pensively.

"You did not tell me all this," said Porthos.

"I had not time to do so, my dear friend."

"And you brought Porthos to Fontainebleau?"

"To Planchet's house."

"Does Planchet live at Fontainebleau?" asked Aramis.

"Yes, near the cemetery," replied Porthos heedlessly.

"What said you, near the cemetery?" inquired Aramis, with some suspicion.

"Well, be it so," said the mousquetaire to himself, "as a blunder has been committed, let us profit by it as best we can."

"Yes, near the cemetery," replied Porthos, "Planchet is an excellent fellow who makes capital preserves, but he has windows, which open to the cemetery; and so it was this morning—"

"This morning!" exclaimed Aramis more and more agitated.

D'Artagnan had turned his back to them and went to the window upon which he drummed a sort of march.

"This morning," continued Porthos, "we saw them bury a Christian."

"Ah! ah!"

"It is very mournful; for my part I would not live in a house with death

so constantly before me. D'Artagnan, on the contrary seems to have a particular fancy for that sort of thing."

"Then d'Artagnan saw what was going on?"

"He did not merely see it, but seemed to devour the spectacle with his eyes."

Aramis shuddered and turned round to look at the mousquetaire; but the latter was already in full conversation with Saint Aignan.

Aramis continued to question Porthos, and when he had squeezed out all the juice from the gigantic orange he threw away the rind.

He returned towards his friend d'Artagnan and slapped him on the shoulder.

"My friend," said, he, when Saint Aignan had withdrawn, for the king's supper had been announced.

"Dear friend," replied d'Artagnan.

"We do not sup with the king, we?"

"Oh! yes, I sup with him."

"Can you chat with me for ten minutes?" asked Aramis.

"Twenty; it will require at least that time before his majesty can seat himself at table—"

"Where would you like to talk?"

"Why, here, upon these benches; the king being gone we can sit down, and the room is empty."

"Let us sit down then."

They sat down, Aramis took d'Artagnan's hand.

"Acknowledge, my dear friend," said he, "that you have advised Porthos to be rather mistrustful of me?"

"I acknowledge it, but not in the sense you mean; I saw that Porthos was wearying himself to death, and I wished by presenting him to the king, to do for him and for you that which you could never have done for yourselves."

"What?"

"To pronounce your eulogium."

"And you indeed did it nobly, thanks."

"And I have brought you nearer to the hat, which was receding."

"Ah! I acknowledge that," said Aramis with a strange smile, "you are, indeed, unique in making the fortune of your friends."

"You see then, that in all this I have only acted to make that of Porthos."

"Yes; and I, on my side, was doing something towards it; but your arm is longer than ours."

It was d'Artagnan's turn to smile.

"Come now," said Aramis, "we owe it to each other to speak frankly, do you still love me, my dear d'Artagnan?"

"As much as ever," replied d'Artagnan, without much compromising himself by the reply.

"I thank you, then, and now for perfect frankness on both sides, you came to Belle-Isle on the king's account?"

"Undoubtedly."

"You came there for the purpose of depriving us of the pleasure of offering Belle-Isle completely fortified to the king."

"But, my friend, in order to have formed a wish to deprive you of that pleasure, it would have been necessary that I should, in the first place, have been informed of your intention."

"You came to Belle-Isle then without knowing any thing?"

"Of you? Oh! yes. How the deuce could I ever imagine Aramis become engineer, and to such a degree as to fortify places like Polybius or Archimedes!"

"That is true; but notwithstanding you had guessed what I was about down yonder?"

"Oh! yes."

"And Porthos also?"

"My very dear friend, as I had not guessed that Aramis was an engineer, I could not certainly guess that Porthos had become one. Some Latin author has said: 'a man may become an orator, but he must be born a poet;' but he never said that a man could be born Porthos and become an engineer."

"Your wit is always delightful," said Aramis, coldly, "but to pursue the subject."

"Go on."

"When you had obtained possession of our secret, you hastened to reveal it to the king."

"I hastened so much the more, my good friend, the faster I saw you run. When a man weighing two hundred and fifty-eight pounds, as Porthos does, rides post—when a prelate, a gouty one, too—your pardon, you told me so yourself—drives so many leagues, full gallop, I naturally imagine that these two friends, who had not even forewarned me of their departure, must have had matter of the highest consequence to conceal from me, and I ride—I ride as fast as my want of flesh and absence of the gout allow me."

"Dear friend, did you not reflect that you might have been rendering to myself and Porthos a very sorry service?"

"I certainly thought of that, but Porthos and you had made me play a very sorry part at Belle-Isle."

"Forgive me," said Aramis.

"Excuse me," said d'Artagnan.

"So that," continued Aramis, "you now know every thing?"

"In good faith, I do not."

"You know that I was obliged instantly to inform M. Fouquet, in order that he might forestal you with the king?"

"That is the obscure part of it."

"Not in the least. You are well aware that M. Fouquet has enemies."

"Oh! yes."

"He has one above all—"

"Dangerous."

"Mortal. Well then, in order to combat the influence of this enemy, M. Fouquet was compelled to prove to the king an unbounded devotedness, attended with great sacrifices. He therefore surprised his majesty by offering him Belle-Isle. Had you arrived in Paris before this, all the effect of the surprise would have been destroyed—we should have appeared to have yielded to fear alone."

"I understand."

"There then lies all the mystery," said Aramis, satisfied that he had completely convinced the mousquetaire."

"Only," observed the latter, "it would have been so much more natural to have taken me aside at Vannes, and said to me 'Dear friend, we are fortifying Belle-Isle en Mer to offer it to the king—do us the service to inform us for whom you are acting. Are you the friend of M. Colbert or of M. Fouquet?' Perhaps I might not have given you an answer, but you would have added, 'Are you my friend?' and I should have said 'Yes.'"

Aramis bent down his head.

"Acting in this way," continued d'Artagnan, "you would have paralyzed me, and I should have returned to the king and have said to him, 'Sire, M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle, and fortifying it well; but here is a word which the governor of Belle-Isle has given me for your majesty.' I should not then have had so stupid a part to play; you would have had your surprise, and we should not have been obliged to squint every time we met at each other."

"While, on the contrary, you now

act as the friend of M. Colbert. Are you then his friend?"

"Who, I? by no means," cried d'Artagnan; "M. Colbert is a miserable pedant, and I hate him as I hated Mazarin, but without fearing him."

"Well, then, I," said Aramis, "love M. Fouquet, and am devoted to him. You know my position—I have no property—M. Fouquet has given me livings, a bishopric—M. Fouquet has behaved generously towards me, and I recollect enough of the world to duly appreciate generous conduct. Therefore M. Fouquet has won my heart, and I have placed myself at his service."

"You could not do better. You have in him a good master."

Aramis pinched his lips.

"The best, I believe, of any that could be found."

And then he paused, seeming to reflect.

D'Artagnan took good care not to interrupt his meditations.

"You doubtless know," suddenly said Aramis, "how Porthos became mixed up in all this?"

"No," said d'Artagnan, "I am curious, it is true, but I never question a friend when he wishes to withhold from me a real secret."

"Well, I will tell you."

"It is not worth the while, if this confidence is to bind me in any way."

"Oh! fear nothing. I have loved Porthos more than any man, because he is plain and good. Porthos has an upright mind; since I have become a bishop I have sought out men of candid natures, who induce me to love the truth and detest intrigue."

D'Artagnan twisted his moustache.

"I saw and sought out Porthos who was at that time altogether unoccupied; his presence recalled to me the happy days of my youth without inducing me to evil in the present. I made him come to Vannes. M. Fouquet who has an affection for me, having seen that Porthos was attached to me, promised him to make him chevalier of the king's orders at the first promotion; that is the whole secret."

"I will not make an improper use of it," said d'Artagnan.

"I know that well, dear friend; there is no man more truly honorable than yourself."

"I flatter myself it is so, Aramis."

"And now."

And the prelate looked at d'Artagnan as if he would read his very soul.

"And now let us speak of ourselves, for ourselves; will you become one of the friends of M. Fouquet? Do not interrupt me before you know what these words imply."

"I am listening."

"Will you become a marshal of France, peer, duke, and possess a duchy worth a million a year?"

"But, my friend," replied d'Artagnan, "what must I do to obtain all this?"

"Be the right hand man of M. Fouquet."

"But I am the king's man, dear friend."

"Not exclusively, I imagine."

"Oh! d'Artagnan is but for one."

"You have, I presume, ambition, as all great hearts like yours must have."

"Why yes."

"Well then?"

"Well then, I desire to be Marshal of France; but the king will make me Marshal of France, duke and peer; the king will give me all that."

Aramis fixed his penetrating glance on d'Artagnan.

"Is not the king, the master," said d'Artagnan.

"No one contests that; but Louis XIII. was also the master."

"Oh! but my dear friend between Richelieu and Louis XIII. there was not a M. d'Artagnan," calmly replied the mousquetaire.

"Around the king," said Aramis, "there are many stumbling-blocks."

"Not for kings."

"Doubtless; but—"

"Hold! Aramis! I see that every one is thinking for himself, and no one for this little prince. I will sustain myself by sustaining him."

"And ingratitude?"

"The weak alone apprehend it."

"You are then perfectly secure."

"I believe so."

"But the king may no longer need you."

"On the contrary I believe he will stand in greater need of me than ever, and mark me, my dear friend, should it be necessary to arrest some new Condé, who would arrest him? This—this alone in France."

And d'Artagnan struck the hilt of his sword.

"You are right," said Aramis, turning pale.

And he rose and pressed d'Artagnan's hand.

"There is the last call to supper,"

said the captain of the mousquetaires.
"You will allow me."

Aramis threw his arm round d'Artagnan's neck, and said to him—

"A friend like you is the brightest jewel in the royal crown."

And they separated.

"I was quite right in saying," thought d'Artagnan, "that there was something in all this."

"We must hasten to fire the gunpowder," said Aramis, "d'Artagnan has discovered the train."

CHAPTER LXXII.

MADAME AND GUICHE.

WE have seen that the Count de Guiche had rushed out of the queen-mother's drawing-room the evening when Louis XIV., with so much gallantry, had offered to Mademoiselle de la Vallière the marvellous bracelets which he had gained in the lottery.

The count walked for some time outside the palace, his mind distracted by a thousand suspicions, a thousand anxieties.

Then he was seen standing on the terrace opposite the promenade watching for the departure of Madame.

A long half hour elapsed in this way. Being alone at this moment, the ideas of the count could not have been of an amusing nature.

He drew his tablets from his pocket, and after a thousand hesitations decided on writing the following words:

"Madame, I entreat you to grant me a moment's conversation. Be not alarmed at this request, which is not at all at variance with the profound respect with which, &c., &c."

He signed this singular petition, which he folded as a billet-doux. He then saw several ladies leaving the palace, then some men; in short, almost all the company that had been of the queen-mother's party.

He saw la Vallière herself, and then Montalais conversing with Malicorne; he saw even to the last of the guests invited by the queen-mother.

Madame had not passed by; it was, however, necessary that she should cross that court-yard to return to her own apartments, and from the terrace Guiche could perceive every thing that passed in that court-yard.

At last he saw Madame coming out, escorted by two pages bearing torches. She was walking quickly, and when she reached her own door she called to the pages.

"Pages," said she, "go and inquire where the Count de Guiche is to be found; he has to give me an account of a commission with which I charged him: should he have returned request him to come to me."

Guiche remained mute and concealed by the shadow of the building; but as soon as Madame had gone into her apartment, he rushed from the terrace down the steps; he assumed a perfectly indifferent air and threw himself in the way of the pages, who were already running toward his rooms.

"Ah! Madame has sent for me," said he, with much emotion.

And he put up his note, which had now become useless.

"Count," said one of the pages on perceiving him, "we are fortunate in meeting you."

"What is it, gentlemen?" said he.

"An order from Madame."

"An order from Madame!" exclaimed Guiche with an air of surprise.

"Yes, count, her royal highness desires to see you. You have to give her, as she told us, some answer as to a commission—are you now at liberty?"

"I am completely at her royal highness' orders."

"Be pleased then to follow us."

When Guiche reached Madame's apartment he found her pale and agitated.

Montalais was standing at the door, somewhat uneasy at the state of the princess' mind.

On Guiche's appearing at the door—

"Ah! it is you, Monsieur de Guiche," cried Madame; "come in, I beg of you. Mademoiselle de Montalais your service is now over."

Montalais, more bewildered than ever, courtesied and withdrew.

Madame and de Guiche remained alone.

The count had every advantage; it was Madame who had given him a rendezvous.

But how could the count avail himself of this advantage, Madame was so fantastic a personage, the disposition of her royal highness was so changeable!

She soon gave evidence of this, for she abruptly began the conversation with:

"Well, have you nothing to say to me?"

He believed that she had divined his thoughts; for those who love are so constituted that they are credulous and blind as poets and prophets are; he believed that she knew that he had a desire to see her, and the subject of that desire.

"Oh! yes, madam, and I consider it most extraordinary—"

"The affair of the bracelets you mean, do you not?" cried she earnestly.

"Yes, madam."

"You believe the king to be in love—tell me."

De Guiche gazed at her intently for some time. She cast down her eyes beneath that glance, which went to the heart.

"I believe," said he, "that the king may have intended to torment some one here. The king, otherwise, would not have shown himself so exceedingly eager, and would not from mere levity of heart have ventured to endanger the reputation of a young girl, hitherto irreproachable."

"Good! that forward creature!" loudly cried the princess.

"I can affirm to your royal highness," replied Guiche with respectful firmness, "that Mademoiselle de la Vallière is beloved by a man whom it is our duty to respect, for he is a man of honor."

"Oh! Bragelonne, perhaps?"

"My friend! yes, madam."

"Well, whether he be your friend or not, what matters that to the king?"

"The king knows that Bragelonne is betrothed to Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and as Raoul has bravely served the king, the king would not inflict on him so irreparable a misfortune."

Madame laughed, and so violently, that it made a painful impression upon Guiche.

"I repeat to you, madam, that I do not believe the king to be in love with la Vallière; and as a proof that I believe so, I wished to ask you whose self-love it was the king desired to wound in this circumstance. You, who know all the court, will assist me in this discovery; and the more surely, as it is said by every one that your royal highness is very intimate with the king."

Madame bit her lips, and failing to find any good reply, she turned the conversation

"Prove to me," said she—fixing upon him one of those looks in which the whole soul seems to be concentrated—"that you wished to question me who have thus sent to you."

Guiche gravely drew from his tablet the note he had written to her.

"Sympathy!" she said.

"Yes," said the count, with insurmountable tenderness, "yes, sympathy; but I have told you why it was I sought you: whereas, you, madam, have still to tell me why you commanded my attendance."

"That is true."

And she hesitated.

"Those bracelets will drive me mad," she said, suddenly.

"You had expected that the king would have offered them to you," observed Guiche.

"And why so?"

"But before you, madam, you, his sister-in-law, was there not the queen?"

"And before la Vallière, had he not me? Had he not the whole court?" cried the princess.

"I must assure you, madam," respectfully said the count, "if any one were to hear you speak thus, were you to be seen with those red eyes, and God pardon me! with that tear just falling from your eyelids—oh! yes, all the world would say that your royal highness is jealous."

"Jealous!" exclaimed the princess, haughtily, "jealous of la Vallière!"

She had expected that Guiche would have been daunted by her haughty gesture and her proud tone.

"Yes, madam, jealous of la Vallière," courageously replied Guiche.

"I believe, sir," stammered she, "that you are allowing yourself to insult me."

"I do not think so," replied the count, rather agitated, but determined to subjugate this furious anger.

"Leave the room!" cried the princess, completely exasperated, so galling were the sang-froid and mute respect of Guiche.

Guiche retired one step, bowed slowly and profoundly, then raised his face, white as his ruffles, and in a slightly agitated voice—

"It was scarcely worth my while to have made such haste," he said, "to incur such unjust disgrace."

And he calmly turned away, and walked towards the door.

He had not gone five paces before Madame sprang after him like a tigress,

seized him by the sleeve, and compelled him to turn round.

"The respect which you affect," cried she, trembling with fury, "is more insulting than an insult. Come, then, insult me, if you will, but, at least, speak."

"And you," said the count, mildly, and drawing his sword, "pierce my heart, but do not kill me by these lingering torments."

From the look he fixed upon her, in which love, resolution, and even despair were blended, she felt an intimate conviction that a man so calm to all appearance, would plunge his sword into his breast did she but add another word.

She snatched the weapon from his hands, and grasping his arm with a wildness which might have been thought tenderness—

"Count," said she, "be more considerate—spare me. You see that I am suffering, and you have no compassion."

Tears, the climax of this fit of passion, choked her utterance. Guiche seeing her thus weeping, took her in his arms and carried her to an arm-chair, a moment more and she would have been suffocated.

"Why," said he, kneeling at her feet, "why do you not confide your sorrows to me? If you love any one, tell me so; I know 'twould kill me, but it would be after having relieved, consoled, and even served you."

"Oh! and you love me to such a degree as this!" cried the princess, overcome.

"I love you even to such a degree as that; yes, madam."

She placed both her hands in his.

"I do love," said she, but in so low a tone that it was scarcely audible.

He however heard it.

"The king?" said he.

She gently shook her head, and her smile was like those gleams of sunshine, after a tempest, which induce us to imagine that Paradise is about to be opened to our view.

"But," added she, "there are other passions in the heart of the nobly born. Love is the poetry of life, but the life of this heart is pride. Count, I was born near to a throne; I am jealous of my rank. Why should the king draw near to him those unworthy of him?"

"Again!" exclaimed the count; "now you are speaking ill of that poor

girl, who is to be the wife of my best friend."

"You are simple enough to believe that?"

"If I did not believe it," said he, turning pale, "Bragelonne should be forewarned to-morrow. Yes, if I suspected that this poor la Vallière had forgotten the vows she made to Raoul—but no, it would be baseness to betray the secret of a woman; it would be a crime to disturb the tranquillity of a friend."

"You believe," cried the princess, bursting into a malicious laugh, "that ignorance is bliss?"

"I do believe it," said he.

"Prove! prove it, then!" said she, eagerly.

"It is very easy, madam. It has been said throughout the court that the king loved you and that you loved the king."

"Well!" said she, breathlessly.

"Well! admit that Raoul, my friend, had come to me and told me that the king loved Madame—yes, that the king had touched Madame's heart, I should, perhaps, have killed Raoul."

"It would have been requisite," replied the princess, with all the obstinacy of women who feel themselves to be impregnable, "that Monsieur de Bragelonne had substantial proofs before saying that to you."

"It is nevertheless a fact," rejoined Guiche, sighing, "that not having been forewarned I have not sought to sift this matter, and that my ignorance has saved my life."

"You would carry your ignorance and your coldness to such a point as that!" said Madame, "you would allow this young man to continue to love la Vallière?"

"Yes, madam, until the day when it shall be proved to me that la Vallière is culpable," said de Guiche.

"But the bracelets?"

"And, madam, since you expected to receive them from the king, what could I have said?"

The argument was a powerful one; the princess was crushed by it. From that moment she could not utter a word in her defence.

But as she had a soul replete with noble sentiments, as she had an ardent and intelligent mind, she fully comprehended Guiche's delicacy.

She clearly read in his heart that he suspected the king of loving la Vallière, and would not employ the vulgar

expedient which consists in disparaging a rival in the mind of a woman by giving her the certitude, the positive assurance, that his rival was deeply enamored of another woman.

She divined that he suspected la Vallière, and that in order to leave her time for her conversion, and that she might not be lost irretrievably, he reserved to himself a more direct mode of procedure, or more positive and defined observation.

In a word, she read so much real greatness, so much generosity in the heart of her lover, that she felt her own warmed by the contact of so pure a flame.

She loved him so tenderly for this that she could not restrain herself from testifying it openly.

"How many words have we uttered uselessly," said she, taking his hand, "suspicions, anxieties, distrust, torments—I believe we have used all these terms."

"Alas! yes, madam!"

"Erase them from your heart as I now drive them from mine. Count, whether this la Vallière loves the king or does not love him—whether the king loves or does not love la Vallière, let us, from this moment, change our former parts. You open your eyes widely, I would wager you do not understand me."

"You are so energetic, madam, that I always tremble, fearing I may displease you."

"Only see now how he trembles! the poor fearful man!" said she, with the most enchanting playfulness. "Yes, sir, I have two parts to act; I am the king's sister and the sister-in-law of his wife; and by that title ought I not to interest myself in their intrigues and family affairs? Your opinion?"

"As little as possible, madam."

"Agreed; but this is a question of dignity; and, besides, I am the wife of Monsieur."

Guiche sighed.

"And which," said she, tenderly, "ought to exhort you to speak to me always with the most sovereign respect."

"Oh!" cried he, falling at her feet and kissing them as if they had been the feet of a divinity.

"In truth," murmured she, "I believe I have still another part to play. I was forgetting that."

"Oh! speak on! speak on!"

"I am a woman!" she said, in a still softer whisper, "and I love."

De Guiche rose up. She opened wide her arms to him: their lips met.

At this moment a step was heard behind the tapestry. Montalais knocked at the door.

"What is it, mademoiselle?" inquired Madame.

"Monsieur de Guiche is sought for," replied Montalais, who had sufficient time to observe the disorder of the actors in these four parts, for Guiche had constantly and heroically played his own.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

MONTALAIS AND MALICORNE.

MONTALAIS had spoken the truth; M. de Guiche called for on all sides, was, from the multiplicity of his avocations, very likely not to have been able to attend to any one.

And therefore, such is the power of a false position that Madame, notwithstanding her wounded pride, despite her inward anger, could not, at all events for the moment, reproach Montalais for having with such audacity infringed the almost royal order with which she had been dismissed.

Guiche also became bewildered, or we should rather say, had lost all self-command before the arrival of Montalais. For he had scarcely heard the voice of the young girl, when without taking leave of Madame, which common politeness would have required even between equals, he fled from the room with an overflowing heart, his brain on fire, leaving the princess with upraised arm making him a farewell gesture.

For Guiche could have said as Cherubino said one hundred years afterwards, that on his lips he bore happiness which would endure to all eternity.

Montalais therefore found the two lovers in a state of great confusion; there was confusion in the air of the one who fled, confusion in the one who remained.

And therefore the young girl casting an inquiring glance around her, murmured:

"Well, I believe that this time I know as much as the most curious

woman in the world could desire to know."

Madame was so much embarrassed by this inquisitorial look, that, as if she had heard what Montalais had said aside, she said not a word to her maid of honor, and casting down her eyes withdrew into her bedroom.

On seeing which Montalais listened, and hearing Madame bolt her door, she clearly comprehended that she had the whole night to herself, and making to the door which had just been closed a not very respectful courtesy which meant to say "good night, princess," she went downstairs to rejoin Malicorne who was much occupied at that moment in following with his eyes, a courier covered with dust who had just issued from the Count de Guiche's apartments.

Montalais at once conceived that Malicorne was occupied in some matter of importance, she therefore allowed him to keep straining his eyes, stretching out his neck, and waited patiently until Malicorne had resumed his natural position when she tapped him on the shoulder.

"Well," said Montalais, "what news have you?"

"M. de Guiche is in love with Madame," said Malicorne.

"You call that news? I have something fresher than that."

"What have you picked up then?"

"That Madame is in love with M. de Guiche."

"The one is merely the consequence of the other."

"Not always, my fine gentleman."

"Is that an axiom you apply to me?"

"Persons present are always excepted."

"Thanks," said Malicorne, "and on the other side," continued he, interrogatively.

"The king wished to see la Vallière after the lottery."

"Well then, of course he saw her."

"By no means."

"What mean you by no means?"

"The door was locked."

"So that—"

"So that the king returned completely out of countenance, or like a thief who had forgotten to bring his tools with him."

"Very well."

"And on the third side?" inquired Montalais.

"The courier who has just arrived

for M. de Guiche was sent by M. de Bragelonne."

"Good!" said Montalais, clapping her hands."

"And why good?"

"Because there will be plenty to do. Should we be troubled with an ennui now we shall be unfortunate indeed."

"It is necessary that we should make a regular division of our work," said Malicorne, "in order to avoid all confusion."

"Nothing can be more simple," replied Montalais, "three intrigues, if warmly carried on and tolerably well managed, will give one with the other and at the lowest calculation three billet-doux per day—"

"Oh!" cried Malicorne, shrugging up his shoulders, "you cannot surely think of what you are saying, three notes a day! why that might be well enough for mere citizens—a mousquetaire on service and a little girl in a convent exchange a note every day either by means of a ladder or a hole made through a wall. A note contains all the poetry of their poor little hearts. But here, at court—oh! how little do you know of royal tenderness, my dear."

"Come now, conclude. We may be interrupted," said Montalais, impatiently.

"Conclude! Why, I am only at the narration, I have still three heads to go through."

"In good truth!" exclaimed Montalais, "he will kill me with this Flemish phlegm."

"And you, you will bewilder my poor brain with your Italian vivacity. I was telling you then, that our lovers here will write whole volumes to each other. But what point are you driving at?"

"To this. That neither of our ladies can keep the letters she will receive."

"That is quite clear."

"That M. de Guiche will not dare to keep his neither."

"That is probable."

"Well then, I will take care of them all."

"And that precisely is impossible," said Malicorne.

"And why impossible?"

"Because you have not an apartment to yourself; because it is occupied in common by la Vallière and you; because all the rooms of the maids of honor can very readily be visited and searched; because I am ap

prehensive of the queen, who is as jealous as a Spaniard, the queen-mother, jealous as two Spaniards, and finally, Madame, who is as jealous as ten Spaniards."

"You are forgetting somebody."

"Who?"

"Monsieur."

"I was speaking only of the women. Therefore let us number the men regularly. We will begin with Monsieur, No. 1."

"Guiche, No. 2."

"No. 3, the Viscount de Bragelonne."

"And the king? the king?"

"No. 4. Undoubtedly, we must reckon the king, who will not only be more jealous, but more powerful than all the rest together. Ah! my dear!"

"Go on."

"In what a hornet's nest have you thrust yourself."

"Not far enough in it yet, if you will only follow me."

"Assuredly I will follow you, however—"

"However?—"

"While we have still the power to do so, I think it will be more prudent to back out."

"And I, on the contrary, think the most prudent course we can pursue is, at once to place ourselves at the head of all these intrigues."

"You would not be able to conduct them."

"With you I would conduct ten such. It is my element do you see," continued Montalais. "I was created to live amid the intrigues of a great court, as a salamander is to live in the midst of flames."

"Your simile does not increase my confidence in the slightest degree, my dear friend. I have heard it said by very scientific men, in the first place, that there is no such a reptile as the salamander, and that were there any they would be most perfectly broiled, most completely roasted when withdrawn from the fire."

"Your learned men may be very learned with regard to salamanders, but they are, assuredly, extremely ignorant with regard to women. How, your most learned men would not be able to tell you that which I am about to tell you. Aure de Montalais is destined to be, and that within a month, the first diplomatist at the court of France."

"Be it so, but on the condition that I shall be the second"

"'Tis agreed; alliance offensive and defensive, that is understood."

"Only, be very cautious as to letters."

"I will hand them over to you as they come into my possession."

"What shall we say to the king about Madame?"

"That Madame still loves the king,"

"What shall we say to Madame about the king?"

"That she is very much in the wrong not to conciliate him."

"What shall we say to la Vallière of Madame?"

"Anything we please; la Vallière is ours."

"Ours?"

"And doubly so."

"How so?"

"By the Viscount de Bragelonne, in the first place."

"Explain yourself."

"You do not forget, I hope, that M. de Bragelonne has written many letters to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"I never forget any thing," replied Malicorne.

"Well, it was I who received those letters; it was I who concealed them."

"And consequently it is you who have them still."

"Precisely."

"Where are they, here?"

"Oh! no. I have them at Blois, in the small room you know of."

"Beloved little chamber!" cried Malicorne, "abode of love, an ante-chamber to the palace which I shall one day have for you. But your pardon, you say that all these letters are in the little room."

"Yes."

"Used you not to put them into a small casket?"

"Undoubtedly, in the same one in which I put the letters I received from you, and in which I deposited mine when your affairs, or your pleasures prevented you from attending our rendezvous."

"Ah! that is very fortunate," said Malicorne.

"And why this satisfaction?"

"Because I foresee the possibility of not being obliged to go so far as Blois after these letters. I have them here."

"You have brought the box with you?"

"It was dear to me from having belonged to you."

"Be very careful of it. That box contains original letters which may

become of great value some time hence."

"I know that, by Jove! and full well; and therefore 'tis I laugh, and laugh most heartily."

"But now a last word."

"And why the last?"

"Do we stand in need of any auxiliaries?"

"None whatever."

"Valets, waiting-maids?"

"Bad! detestable! You will deliver the letters, you will receive them. Oh! no foolish pride! or otherwise M. Malicorne and Mademoiselle Aure, not themselves transacting their own affairs, must make up their minds to see them carried out by others."

"You are right; but what is going on in M. de Guiche's rooms?"

"Nothing; he is opening his window."

"Let us vanish."

And they both in fact disappeared; the conspiracy was combined.

The window which had been opened was in fact that of the Count de Guiche.

But, as might have been imagined by ignorant people, it was not merely to see the shadow of Madame upon her window curtains that he had placed himself at the window, and his meditations were not altogether caused by love.

He had, as we have before said, just received a courier; this courier had been sent to him by Bragelonne; Bragelonne had written to him.

He had read and re-read the letter, which had made a profound impression upon him.

"Strange! strange!" murmured he, "By what powerful means does destiny drag men on towards their end!"

And leaving the window to go to the lamp standing on the table, he for the third time read the letter, the lines of which at once scared his mind and his eyes.

"CALAIS.

"MY DEAR COUNT:—I have found M. de Wardes at Calais, who has been dangerously wounded in an affair with the Duke of Buckingham.

"De Wardes is, you know, a man of courage; but he is full of hatred and malice

"He spoke much of you, towards whom he said his heart had a great inclination; of Madame, whom he thinks beautiful and amiable

"He has divined your love for the person you know of.

"He has also spoken to me of a person whom I love, and has evinced the greatest interest for me by pitying me; and all this with an obscurity which at first alarmed me; but which at last I attributed as being the result of the mysterious mode of conversation which he always adopts.

"The following are the facts:

"He had received news from the court; you will readily understand that it could only be through M. de Lorraine

"Every one is talking, say the news, of a change which has taken place in the king's affections.

"You know whom this relates to.

"And afterwards, continued the news reporter, *they speak of a maid of honor who has given rise to some scandal.*

"These vague phrases prevented me from sleeping. I have deplored since yesterday that my straightforward and feeble character, notwithstanding some degree of obstinacy, did not allow me to make some observations on these insinuations.

"In a word, M. de Wardes was about to set out for Paris, and I did not like to delay his departure by asking him for an explanation; and besides which it appeared hard to me, and I acknowledge it, to ask for explanations of a man whose wounds were scarcely closed.

"In short, he has set out, travelling by easy stages, being desirous, as he said, to witness the curious spectacle which the court cannot fail to present in a short time.

"He added to those words certain congratulations, and then certain condolences, neither of which could I in any way comprehend. I was confused by my own thoughts, and by my feelings of mistrust towards that man—a mistrust which you, better than any one, know I could never surmount.

"But when he was gone, my mind became clearer.

"It would be impossible for a disposition like that of de Wardes not to infiltrate some portion of its malevolence into the conversation we had together.

"It is therefore impossible that in all the mysterious words which M. de Wardes uttered there should not be some mysterious sense which I could apply either to myself or to the person you know of

"Compelled as I am to set sail immediately, in obedience to the king, I could not think of riding after M. de Wardes to obtain some explanation of his reservations, but I send a courier to you, and send this letter, which will expose to you all my doubts.

"You and I are one: you will act in consequence.

"M. de Wardes will shortly arrive: ascertain what he meant to say, if you do not already know it."

"Besides which M. de Wardes pretended that the Duke of Buckingham had left Paris overwhelmed by Madame's kindness: this was a matter which would have instantly induced me to have called him out, had it not been for the necessity I felt under of attending to the king's service before venturing upon any personal quarrel.

"Olivain will deliver this letter to you. Burn it as soon as you have read it.

"Olivain is fidelity personified.

"Be pleased, I beg of you, my dear count, to recall me to the mind of Mademoiselle de Vallière, whose hands I respectfully kiss.

"As to yourself, I embrace you.

"(Signed) VISCOUNT DE BRAGELONNE."

"P. S. If any thing serious should occur—and we should foresee every thing, my friend—send me a courier with but this word, 'Come;' and I will be in Paris in thirty-six hours after the receipt of your letter."

Guiche sighed, refolded the letter for the third time, and instead of burning it as Raoul had recommended, he again put it into his pocket.

He wished to read it over and over again.

"What agitation and what confidence at one and the same time!" murmured the count. "Raoul's entire soul is in that letter."

"In it he forgets the Count de la Fère, and he speaks of his respect for Louise."

"He gives me a warning, he entreats me for himself.

"Ah!" continued Guiche, with a threatening gesture, "you meddle in my affairs M. de Wardes, do you? well then, I shall employ myself a little about yours.

"As to you, poor Raoul, your heart has placed a treasure in my care, I will watch over it, do not fear."

Having made this promise, de Guiche sent to Malicorne to beg him to come

to him without delay, if it were possible.

Malicorne accepted the invitation with an alacrity which was the first result of his conversation with Montalais.

The more de Guiche, who thought himself perfectly unsuspected, questioned Malicorne the more the latter, who was darkly cautious, discovered the object of his interrogator.

The consequence of this was that after a quarter of an hour's conversation, during which Guiche thought he had discovered the whole truth with regard to la Vallière, he learnt absolutely nothing but what he had seen with his own eyes, while Malicorne ascertained or divined, that Raoul being at a distance had some mistrustful forebodings, and that Guiche had been requested to watch over the treasure of the Hesperides.

Malicorne accepted the post of dragon.

Guiche believed that he had done all that could be done for his friend, and therefore devoted his attention to his own affairs.

The next evening the return of de Wardes was announced and his first appearance before the king.

After this visit the convalescent was to call upon Monsieur.

Guiche went to Monsieur's apartment before the hour appointed for de Wardes' visit.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

HOW DE WARDES WAS RECEIVED AT COURT.

MONSIEUR had received de Wardes with that signal favor granted by frivolous minds eager for fresh stimulus, to any new comer who may happen to present himself.

De Wardes, who, in fact, had not been seen for nearly a month, was fresh fruit. To caress him was, in the first place, committing an infidelity to those already there, and an infidelity has always a peculiar charm; it was, moreover, a reparation due personally to him, de Wardes. Monsieur's reception of him was therefore most kind and favorable.

The Chevalier de Lorraine, who much feared this rival, but who respected in him a nature completely similar to his own, but which, in de Wardes, was ac-

accompanied by real courage, the Chevalier de Lorraine's caresses were even more affectionate and tender than those of Monsieur.

Guiche, as we have stated in the last chapter, was there but kept himself in the back grounds waiting patiently till all these huggings and embracings had subsided.

De Wardes, while speaking to the others, and even to Monsieur, had not lost sight of Guiche; his instinct told him that he was there on his account.

And therefore he went towards de Guiche as soon as he had finished with the others.

They exchanged the most courteous compliments, after which de Wardes returned to Monsieur and the other gentlemen.

Amid all these congratulations as to his safe return, Madame was announced.

Madame had been informed of the arrival of de Wardes; she knew all the details of his journey, and of his duel with Buckingham; she wished to be present when the first words should be pronounced by the man whom she knew to be her enemy.

She had three ladies with her.

De Wardes made a most graceful salutation to Madame, and by way of at once commencing hostilities announced that he was ready to give news of Buckingham to any friends of the duke.

This was a direct retort to the coldness with which Madame had received him.

The attack was a sharp one. Madame felt the blow without appearing to have received it; she cast a rapid glance at Monsieur and on Guiche.

Monsieur colored: Guiche turned pale.

Madame alone kept her countenance; but aware that this enemy might excite unpleasant feelings in the minds of the two persons who were listening to her, she smilingly leaned towards the traveller.

The traveller spoke upon other subjects.

Madame was courageous even to imprudence; any retreat immediately made her advance. After the first misgivings of her heart, she returned to the attack.

"Have you suffered much from your wounds, Monsieur de Wardes?" she inquired, "for we had heard that you had been so unlucky as to be wounded."

It was de Wardes' turn to shudder he bit his lips.

"No, madam," said he, "scarcely at all."

"And yet with the dreadfully hot weather we have had."

"The sea air is refreshing, madam, and besides which I had a consolation."

"Oh! so much the better! and what was it?"

"That of knowing that my adversary was suffering more than I did."

"Ah! he was more seriously wounded than you were? I was ignorant of that," observed the princess with perfect insensibility.

"Oh! madam, you are mistaken, or rather you pretend to have mistaken my words. I do not say that his body has suffered more than mine, but his heart was wounded."

Guiche foresaw the direction the combat was about to take, and he ventured to make a sign to Madame; this sign implored her to abandon the contest.

But the princess, without replying to Guiche, without appearing to have observed his sign, and still smiling:

"What?" she asked, "the Duke of Buckingham, was he then wounded in the heart? I had not believed, up to the present time, that a wound in the heart was curable."

"Alas! madam," gracefully replied de Wardes, "all women believe that, and it is that which gives them such a superiority over us, the superiority of confidence."

"My dear, you misunderstand the matter," said the prince, impatiently. "M. de Wardes means to say that the Duke of Buckingham was wounded in the heart by something else than a sword."

"Ah! very well, very well," exclaimed the princess. "Ah! it is a jest on the part of M. de Wardes; 'tis well, only I should be glad to know whether the Duke of Buckingham would greatly relish a jest of such a nature, it is much to be regretted, M. de Wardes, that his grace is not here."

The eyes of the young man flashed fire.

"Oh!" cried he, his teeth close set, "I also regret it much."

Guiche did not stir.

Madame appeared to expect that he would come to her aid.

Monsieur hesitated.

The Chevalier de Lorraine advanced and bowing ceremoniously—

"Madam," said he, "de Wardes knows full well that for a Buckingham to be wounded in the heart is by no means strange, such things have been done seen more than once."

"Instead of an ally two enemies," murmured Madame, "two enemies leagued against me, and inveterate ones."

And she changed the conversation.

"It is well known, that to change a conversation is the right of princes, and one that etiquette obliges all to respect."

The remainder of the conversation was therefore carried on in a milder tone; the principal actors had got through their parts.

Madame withdrew at an early hour, and Monsieur, who wished to question her, offered her his hand and accompanied her.

The chevalier was too apprehensive that a good understanding should be re-established between them to leave them quietly together.

He therefore went towards Monsieur's apartment to catch him on his return, in order to destroy with three words any good impression Madame might have made on the heart of her husband.

Guiche advanced a step towards de Wardes, who was surrounded by several persons.

He thus acquainted him with his desire to speak with him. Wardes, with his eyes and head, made him a sign that he understood him.

This sign, to strangers, had a perfectly friendly meaning.

Guiche could therefore turn round and wait.

He did not wait long. De Wardes having got rid of the persons with whom he had been conversing, approached Guiche, and both of them, after a new salutation, walked up and down the room, side by side.

"You have returned in good health, my dear de Wardes," said the count.

"Excellent, as you see."

"And your mind is as lively as ever?"

"Even more so."

"That is a great happiness."

"How can it be otherwise? There is so much buffoonery in this world, every thing around us is so grotesque."

"You are right."

"Ah! you are then of my opinion?"

"Undoubtedly. And do you bring any news?"

"No, on my faith. I have come here in search of news."

"Your pardon: you however saw some people at Calais—one of our friends, and not very long ago."

"People—one of our friends—"

"Why, you have but a short memory."

"Ah! it is true—Bragelonne."

"Precisely."

"Who was going on a mission to King Charles."

"That is it. Well! did he not tell you something, or did you not tell him something?"

"I really scarcely know what I told him; but I know well what I did not tell him."

De Wardes was subtly personified. He felt convinced by Guiche's attitude, an attitude replete with coldness and dignity, that the conversation was about to take an unpleasant turn. He resolved therefore to be guided by the conversation and to keep upon his guard.

"And what is the thing you did not tell him, if you please?" inquired Guiche.

"Why, the thing about la Vallière."

"La Vallière! what mean you by that? And what is this extraordinary thing which you knew down yonder, whilst Bragelonne, who was here, knew nothing of it?"

"Do you really ask that question seriously?"

"Nothing can be more serious."

"What! you, a man of the court; you, living in Madame's house; you, the daily guest; you, the friend of Monsieur; you, the favorite of our lovely princess!"

Guiche reddened with anger.

"Of what princess are you speaking?" demanded he.

"Why, I know only one, my dear count—I am speaking of Madame. Have you another princess in your heart! Come now."

Guiche was about to break out. But he saw through the feint.

A quarrel was imminent between the two young men. De Wardes wished only to quarrel with regard to Madame, while Guiche would not accept it but in the name of la Vallière. From that moment it was merely a combat of feints, and which was to last until one of them was touched.

Guiche therefore resumed his self possession.

"In all this there is not the slightest question as to Madame, my dear de Wardes," said Guiche, "but only as to what you said a moment since."

"And what did I say?"

"That you had concealed certain things from Bragelonne."

"And of which you are informed as well as I am," replied de Wardes,

"No, on my honor."

"Oh! you are jesting!"

"If you tell me it I shall know it; but not otherwise, and that I swear."

"How! I have arrived from a place sixty leagues from this; you have not stirred from here—you have seen with your own eyes that which rumor alone transmitted to me—and I hear you tell me seriously that you know nothing of all this. Oh! count, you are not charitable."

"It shall be as you please, Wardes. But I repeat to you that I know nothing."

"You would be discreet, that is prudent."

"Therefore you will tell me nothing—not more than you told to Bragelonne?"

"You only turn a deaf ear. I am convinced that Madame could not be so much mistress of herself as you are."

"Ah! double hypocrite!" murmured Guiche, "you are getting back to your old ground again."

"Well, then," continued de Wardes, "since it is so difficult for us to understand each other as to la Vallière and Bragelonne, let us talk of your own personal affairs."

"Why," cried Guiche, "I have no personal affairs—I—you did not, I suppose, say any thing of me to Bragelonne that you cannot repeat to me?"

"No; but do you not comprehend, Guiche, that ignorant as I may be on some matters, I am well informed on others. If, for instance, I were requested to speak to you of M. de Buckingham's intimacies at Paris, as I performed the whole journey side by side with the duke, I might relate to you some very interesting matters. Do you wish me to tell you of them?"

Guiche passed his hand over his brow, which was moist with perspiration.

"Why, no," said he, "a hundred times, no! I have no curiosity, whatsoever, as to matters which do not concern me. M. de Buckingham is to me but a mere acquaintance, while Raoul is my intimate friend. I have there-

fore no curiosity to know what may have happened to the duke of Buckingham, while on the contrary I have the greatest interest in knowing whatever may have happened to Raoul."

"At Paris."

"Yes, at Paris or at Calais. You will understand that I am here, present; should any thing occur, I am here to face it; while Raoul on the contrary is absent, at a distance, and has only me to represent him here; therefore Raoul's affairs are my own."

"But Raoul will return."

"Yes, when his mission is completed; in the mean time, you understand, no unfavorable rumors with regard to him can be circulated without my examining into them."

"And the more so as he will remain some time in London," said de Wardes, jeeringly.

"Do you think so?" asked Guiche, in the most simple manner imaginable.

"Yes, by Jove! Do you think he would have been sent to London only to go there and return? Oh! no: he he was sent to London that he may remain there."

"Ah! count," cried Guiche, seizing de Wardes' hand, and firmly grasping it, "this is a very unfortunate suspicion as regards Bragelonne, and justifies in a marvellous manner what he wrote to me from Calais."

De Wardes became cold again; his love of sarcasm had carried him too far, and he had, by his imprudence, given a hold upon himself.

"Well, let us see, what has he written?" inquired he.

"That you had whispered to him some perfidious insinuations against la Vallière, and that you had appeared to laugh at his great confidence in that young girl."

"Yes, I did all that," said de Wardes, "and I was prepared, in doing so, to hear the Viscount de Bragelonne say to me what every man says to another man who has displeased him. Then, for instance, were I to seek a quarrel with you, I would tell you that Madame, after having distinguished M. de Buckingham, is now reported to have dismissed the handsome duke only that you might profit by it."

"Oh! that would not wound me in the slightest degree, dear de Wardes," said de Guiche, smiling, despite the shudder which thrilled through his veins. "The deuse! such feigned favor is sweet as honey."

"Agreed; but if I wished absolutely to quarrel with you, I would endeavor to make you give me the lie, and I would speak to you of a certain thickset in which you met this illustrious princess, of certain genuflections, of certain kissings of the hand, and you, who are a secret, quick, and punctilious man—"

"Well, no, I swear to you," said Guiche, interrupting him with a smile upon his lips, although he believed he was about to die, "I swear to you that it would in no way touch me, and that I would not give you the lie; what would you, count, I am so constituted with regard to matters that concern me personally, that I am even of ice like coldness. But, in any thing that concerns a friend, it is a totally different matter, and particularly when that friend is absent, and before setting out had confided his interests to my care; for that friend, do you see, de Wardes, I am all fire."

"I understand you, Monsieur de Guiche," said de Wardes; "but say what you please, there can be no question between us at this moment either with regard to Bragelonne or that little unimportant girl whom they call la Vallière."

At this moment some young men attached to the court were crossing the room, and having heard the words which had just been spoken, their attention was naturally attracted to the conversation, and they listened to its continuation.

De Wardes perceived this, and went on in a louder tone.

"Oh! if la Vallière were a coquette like Madame, whose incitements, no doubt very innocent ones, in the first place caused M. de Buckingham to be sent back to England, and afterwards your exile, for in short you allowed yourself to be deceived by these incitements, was it not so, gentlemen?"

The gentlemen approached, Saint Aignan at the head, Manicamp following him.

"Why, what could I do?" said Guiche, laughing, "I am a vain fop, all the world knows that; I considered as serious what was a mere pleasantry, and I got myself exiled for it. But I have seen my error; I have humbled my vanity by bowing down before those I had offended, and I obtained my recall by making this atonement, and promising myself to get radically cured of this defect, and you see how well I have succeeded, for I am now laughing at

that which four days ago was breaking my heart. But he, Raoul, he loves, he is beloved, he does not laugh at rumors which may disturb his happiness, rumors of which you have made yourself the mouth-piece, notwithstanding that you knew, as I do, as these gentlemen do, as all the world does, that these rumors were but calumny."

"Calumny!" exclaimed de Wardes, furious at finding himself pushed into the trap by Guiche's cool composure.

"Why yes, a calumny. Here is his letter, in which he tells me that you had spoken ill of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and asks me if what you have said is true. Shall I make these gentlemen judges in the matter, de Wardes?"

And with the greatest composure, Guiche read aloud that passage of the letter regarding la Vallière.

"And now," continued Guiche, "it is well proved to me that you wished to disturb the tranquillity of my dear friend Bragelonne, and that the terms you used were malicious."

De Wardes looked around him to ascertain whether he was likely to obtain support or countenance from any person present; but at the idea that de Wardes had directly or indirectly insulted the idol of the day, every one shook his head, and de Wardes saw only men who were disposed to think him in the wrong.

"Gentlemen," said de Guiche, instinctively divining the general feeling, "our discussion with M. de Wardes bears on so very delicate a subject, that it is important you should not hear more of it than you have already heard. Therefore let me beg of you to keep the doors closed, and allow us to conclude this conversation in a manner befitting gentlemen, one of whom has given the other the lie."

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" cried the company.

"Do you think that I am wrong in defending Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said Guiche to them; "in that case I stand condemned; and I withdraw the offensive words I may have uttered to M. de Wardes."

"The deuse!" cried St. Aignan, "by no means. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is an angel."

"She is virtue and purity in person," added Manicamp.

"You see, Monsieur de Wardes," said Guiche, "I am not the only one who comes forward to defend the poor

child. Gentlemen, for the second time, I beg of you to leave us. You see that it is impossible to be more calm than we are."

The courtiers asked nothing better than to retire to a distance; some of them went to one door, some to another.

The two young men remained alone.

"Well played," said de Wardes to the count.

"Is it not?" replied de Guiche.

"It could not be otherwise, for I have got rusty in the country; whereas you—the command you have attained over yourself absolutely astounds me, count; there is something always to be acquired in the society of women: pray accept my sincere compliments on this head."

"I accept them."

"And I will return them to Madame."

"Oh! as to that, Monsieur de Wardes, you may now speak as loudly with regard to her as you please."

"Do not dare me."

"Oh! I defy you to it. You are known to be a malignant man: if you do that you will be considered as a base one; and Monsieur would have you hanged this evening to his window bars. Speak, my dear de Wardes, speak!"

"I am defeated."

"Yes, but not so completely yet as is necessary."

"I see that you would not be sorry to me beat to the uttermost."

"No; and more than that."

"The deuce! in reality my dear count you have hit on an unfortunate moment; after the one I have just got through, another game of the same kind cannot in any way suit me. I lost too much blood at Calais; at the slightest effort I should make my wounds open anew; and, in truth, you would with me have too easy a conquest."

"That is true," replied Guiche, "but yet on arriving here you boastingly showed off your excellent state of health, and strength of arm."

"Yes, the arms are in good order still, but the legs are weak; and besides which I have not had a foil in my hand since that confounded duel; and you, I will answer for it, are fencing every day, in order properly to carry out your little plot."

"Upon my honor, sir," cried de Guiche, "I have not fenced for the last six months."

"No; do you see, count, after mature reflection I will not fight—at all events, with you. I will wait for Bragelonne, since you say it is Bragelonne who is angry with me."

"Oh! no, not by any means; you shall not wait for Bragelonne," cried Guiche, with great fury, "for—and you yourself told me so—Bragelonne's return may be delayed; and during that time your malice will work its way."

"And yet I shall have an excuse. Beware!"

"It would take you a week to re-establish yourself completely."

"That is somewhat better; in a week then we shall see."

"Yes, yes, I understand; in eight days a man can escape his enemy. No, no, not even one."

"You are mad, sir," replied de Wardes, retiring one step.

"And you, you are a vile wretch, if you will not fight willingly!"

"Well?"

"I will denounce you to the king at having refused to fight after having insulted la Vallière."

"Ah!" exclaimed de Wardes, "you are dangerously perfidious, my most virtuous gentleman."

"There is nothing more dangerous than the perfidy of a man who always acts loyally."

"Restore my legs to me, or let yourself be bled to the last drop, in order to equalize our chances."

"Not at all. I have something better than all that."

"Speak, then."

"We will both get on horseback, take our pistols, and exchange three shots. You are a dead shot; I have seen you knock down swallows with a ball, and at a gallop. Do not say no, for I have seen it myself."

"I think you are right," said de Wardes, "and in this way it is possible that I may kill you."

"In truth, you would do me a great service."

"I will do my best."

"Is it agreed?"

"Your hand."

"Here it is, on one condition, however."

"And what is that?"

"You will swear to me not to say any thing, or have any thing said to the king."

"Nothing, I swear it."

"I will go and fetch my horse."

"And I mine."

"Where shall we go?"

"Into the plain; I know an excellent spot."

"Shall we set out together?"

"Why not?"

And both of them going towards the stables, passed under Madame's windows which were faintly illuminated. The shadow of a female form was seen increasing upon the lace curtains.

"Yonder is a woman," said de Wardes, smiling, "who little suspects that we are going to meet death on her account."

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE COMBAT.

WARDES chose a horse for himself, as did Guiche.

Then each saddled his own, selecting saddles that had holsters.

De Wardes had no pistols at Fontainebleau; Guiche had two pair. He went to his rooms for them, loaded them, and requested de Wardes to make his choice.

De Wardes took those with which he had fired at least twenty times; the same with which Guiche had seen him shoot swallows on the wing.

"You will not be astonished," said he, "at my adopting every precaution; you are well acquainted with your own weapons, I therefore, consequently, am only endeavoring to equalize the chances."

"That observation was useless," replied Guiche, "for you are acting only as you have the right to act."

"Now," said de Wardes, "I must beg of you to assist me to get upon my horse, for it is still a rather difficult matter."

"Then we had better have gone on foot."

"No, once in the saddle I am as firm as any one."

"Tis well; we'll say no more about it."

And Guiche assisted de Wardes to mount his horse.

"Now," said de Wardes, "in our ardor to exterminate each other there is one thing we have overlooked."

"What is that?"

"That it is no longer daylight, and we must grope about in the dark in order to kill each other."

"Be it so; the result will be the same."

"And besides, there is another circumstance we ought to have considered which is, that men of respectability do not go out to fight without companions."

"Oh!" cried Guiche, "you are as desirous as I am that things should be properly conducted."

"Yes, but I would not leave it in the power of any one to say that you have assassinated me, nor in the contrary case, should I kill you, that I should be accused of having committed a crime."

"Was any thing of the kind said with regard to your duel with the Duke of Buckingham?" said Guiche, "it was, notwithstanding, carried out in nearly the same manner that ours is about to be."

"I will observe to you that it was still daylight, and that we were in the water up to our knees. Moreover, there were a tolerable number of spectators ranged along the beach, who were looking at us."

Guiche reflected for a moment, but the thought which had already presented itself to his mind had attained greater power. This thought was, that de Wardes wished to have seconds, in order to renew the conversation with regard to Madame, and give a new aspect to the combat.

He therefore did not reply; and as de Wardes looked at him still inquiringly, he replied by a sign with his head, which implied that it was better to leave matters as they were.

The two adversaries therefore set off together, going out by the gate which we already know from having seen Montalais and Malicorne upon the wall close to it.

Night, as if purposing to combat the excessive heat of the day, had amassed all the clouds, which she pushed silently and heavily from the west towards the east. This murky dome, unattended by either lightning or thunder, hung heavily above the earth, and from the efforts of the rising wind began to be torn asunder.

Drops of water were falling large and tepid upon the earth, on which they agglomerated the dust in rolling globules.

The blossomed hedges, the drooping flowers, exhaled a thousand aromatic odors, exciting the sweet remembrance of youthful joys and all the happiness of life.

"The earth exhales delicious odors," said de Wardes; "it is a coquetry on her part to attract us towards her."

"By-the-by," said Guiche, "several ideas have struck me which I wish to submit to you."

"Relating to what?"

"Relating to our combat."

"It in fact appears to me to be full time that we should think about it."

"Shall it be an ordinary combat, and regulated according to general usage?"

"Let us hear your usage."

"We will alight from our horses in a good even plain; we will tie up our horses to any thing we can meet with; we will then repair to the spot, and turning our backs to each other walk one hundred and fifty paces, then turn round and advance upon each other."

"Good! it was in this way that I killed poor Follivant, three years ago come St. Denis' day."

"Your pardon—there is one particular you are forgetting."

"What is that?"

"In your duel with Follivant you were on foot, and advanced towards each other, your swords between your teeth and a pistol in each hand."

"That is true. This time, however, as I cannot walk, and that you have acknowledged, we will remount our horses and ride toward each other; the first who chokes to fire, fires."

"That will be the best way, undoubtedly; but it is dark, and we must calculate that there will be more shots lost than by daylight."

"Be it so. Each shall be allowed three shots, the two which are already loaded, and a third to be reloaded."

"That will do. Where shall our combat take place?"

"Have you any preference?"

"No."

"You see that little wood before us?"

"The wood of Rôchin?—perfectly."

"Do you know it?"

"Perfectly."

"You know that there is a clear spot in the centre of it?"

"Yes."

"Let us go to that clearing."

"Be it so."

"It is a sort of natural lists, with all sorts of paths and roads traversing it. The place is admirably adapted for such a meeting."

"Well, be it there, if you wish it so. We have reached the place, I believe?"

"Yes; only see what fine space there is in yonder circle. The faint light which falls from the stars, as Corneille says, seems to be concentrated in that place. Its natural limits are the wood and its barriers which surround it."

"Well, be it as you say."

"Let us then conclude our conditions."

"Mine are the following. Should you object to any of them you have only to say so."

"I am all attention."

"A horse killed, his master is compelled to fight on foot."

"That is incontestable as we have no spare horses."

"But this shall not oblige the adversary to alight from his horse."

"The adversary shall act as he thinks proper."

"The adversaries, having once met, cannot again leave each other, and consequently will fire at each other muzzle to muzzle."

"Agreed."

"Three shots, and no more; is it not so?"

"That, I believe will be enough."

"Here is powder and ball for your pistols. Measure three charges; take three balls. I will do the same, and then we will throw away the remainder of the powder and balls."

"And we will swear by the cross," said de Wardes, "that we have no more powder or balls about us."

"That is agreed; I now swear it."

And Guiche raised his hand towards the sky.

Wardes imitated him.

"And now, my dear count," said he, "let me tell you that I am in no wise a dupe. You are, or you will be the lover of Madame. I have divined the secret; you are fearful that I should divulge it. You wish to kill me to insure my silence. That is perfectly natural, and in your place I should do the same."

Guiche bowed his head.

"Only," continued de Wardes, triumphantly, "was it worth the while to hamper one still further with that unpleasant affair of Bragelonne's. Take care, my dear friend, by bringing the boar to bay you render him furious; by forcing the fox you give him the ferocity of the jaguar. The result is, that being thus pushed to an extremity by you I shall defend myself to the death."

"It is your right."

"Yes, but beware, I shall do much harm. Thus, to begin, and this you will readily understand, that I have not locked up my secret, or rather your secret, in my heart. There is a friend, a talented friend, and you know him, who participates my secret. Therefore understand this well; should you kill me my death will not have served you much, while on the other hand should I kill you, and every thing is possible; you understand what I would say?"

Guiche shuddered.

"Should I kill you," continued de Wardes, "you will have raised against Madame two enemies who will do all in their power to ruin her."

"Oh! sir!" cried Guiche, much exasperated, "do not thus calculate upon my death: of those two enemies I fully hope to kill the one immediately, and the other at the very first opportunity."

De Wardes only replied by bursting into a loud laugh so demoniacal in its sound that a superstitious man would have been terrified.

But Guiche was not a man to allow himself to be alarmed by such a trifle.

"I believe," said he, "that every thing is arranged, M. de Wardes, therefore take your distance if you please, unless you should prefer that I should do so."

"Oh! no," said de Wardes, "delighted to save you that trouble."

And putting his horse into a gallop he crossed the open space to the whole of its extent, and took his station at the other end of it opposite the spot where Guiche had stopped.

Guiche remained motionless.

At the distance of about a hundred yards, the two adversaries were absolutely invisible to one another, shaded as they were by the immense elms and chestnut trees.

A minute passed in the most profound silence.

At the end of this minute each of them, from the dark shade which concealed him, heard the double click of his adversary's pistol lock.

Guiche adopting the tactic most in use, put his horse to the gallop, persuaded that there was a double chance of safety in the undulating motion, and in the rapidity of his advance.

He advanced in a straight line towards the post which, in his opinion, his adversary occupied.

He expected to meet de Wardes half way, but he was mistaken.

He continued his course, presuming

that de Wardes was waiting for him motionless, to fire as he drew near him.

But when he had rode about two thirds of the distance, he saw the clearing suddenly illuminated by a flash, and a ball which whistled close over his head, cut the feather which he wore round his hat.

Almost at the same moment, and as if the light from the first shot had served to direct the other, a second shot was heard, and a second ball passed through the head of de Guiche's horse a little below the ear.

The horse fell.

These two shots, coming from a direction totally different to that in which he expected to find Wardes struck Guiche with surprise, but as he was a man of great self-possession, he calculated his fall, but not with sufficient precision to prevent the toe of his boot from being caught under his horse.

Fortunately the poor animal, in its last agony, made a movement which enabled Guiche to drag his foot from under it. Guiche rose up, stretched his limbs, and found that he had not been wounded.

From the moment that he felt the horse sinking he had placed both the pistols in the holsters, fearing that the fall might cause one or even both of the pistols to go off, which would have completely disarmed him.

As soon as he got upon his legs he took the pistols from their holsters and advanced towards the spot where by the flash of the discharge he had caught a glimpse of de Wardes.

From the first shot Guiche had instantly duly appreciated the manœuvre of de Wardes, which in itself was simple enough. Instead of riding towards Guiche or remaining at his station awaiting him, de Wardes had followed the shadowy circle of the trees and which completely hid him from his adversary, and at the moment when the latter presented his side to him he had fired at him from his place, taking a deliberate and steady aim, and rather favored than otherwise by the gallop of the horse.

It has been seen that notwithstanding the darkness the first ball had passed scarcely an inch above de Guiche's head.

De Wardes was so sure of his shot that he imagined he saw Guiche fall. His astonishment was great when he

perceived that the cavalier still remained in the saddle.

He hastened to fire the second shot, his hand swerved a little and he killed the horse.

This was a fortunate unskilfulness, if Guiche should remain entangled beneath the animal. Before he could disengage himself de Wardes could re-load his pistol, and thus have Guiche at his mercy.

But on the contrary Guiche was on his legs and had three shots to fire.

Guiche at once comprehended the position. He felt that it was necessary to be beforehand with de Wardes. He therefore ran towards him at full speed in order to reach him before he had time to load his third shot.

De Wardes saw him approaching with the rapidity of a whirlwind. The ball fitted rather tightly and resisted the pressure of the ramrod. To load badly was exposing himself to lose his third shot altogether; to load well was losing time, or rather, it was losing his life.

He made his horse jump on one side.

Guiche made a half turn, and at the moment the horse's legs came to the ground again he fired, and the ball knocked off de Wardes' hat.

De Wardes felt that he had now a moment to spare; he took advantage of it to ram home the pistol ball.

Guiche, not seeing his adversary fall, threw from him his first pistol, which had become useless, and walked up towards de Wardes, raising the second.

But the third step he took de Wardes aimed at him as he was walking and fired.

A wild roar of rage was the reply; the count's arm fell convulsively to his side.

The pistol fell to the ground.

De Wardes saw the count stoop, pick up the pistol with his left hand, and make another step in advance.

The moment was one of fatal interest.

"I am lost," murmured de Wardes, "he is not mortally wounded.

But at the moment when Guiche was raising his pistol, and almost near enough to touch de Wardes, the head, the shoulders and the legs of the count failed him all at once. He heaved a long-drawn sigh, and fell close to the feet of de Wardes' horse.

"We must be off!" murmured the

latter, and, gathering up his reins, he spurred his horse.

The horse bounded over the prostrate body, and with great rapidity carried de Wardes back to the palace.

When arrived there de Wardes meditated for a quarter of an hour as to the course he ought to adopt.

In his impatience to leave the field of battle he had neglected to assure himself that Guiche was really dead.

A double hypothesis presented itself to de Wardes' agitated mind.

Either Guiche was killed or he was only wounded.

If Guiche were absolutely killed ought he to have left his body there to be devoured by the wolves? It was a gratuitous cruelty, since if Guiche were killed he certainly could not tell how it had happened.

If he was still alive, why, by not giving him due succor should he allow himself to be considered as a savage incapable of generosity?

This last consideration at once convinced him.

De Wardes inquired after Manicamp.

He was informed that Manicamp had been inquiring for Guiche, and not knowing where to find him he had gone to bed.

Wardes went to awaken the sleeper, and related the affair, which Manicamp listened to without uttering a word, but with an expression of increasing energy of which his placid features would not have been thought capable.

Only when de Wardes had concluded Manicamp jumped out of bed, hastily dressed himself, and then pronounced one single word—

"Come!"

As they were walking towards the wood, Manicamp became more and more agitated, for de Wardes related to him all the particulars of the event, and his features assumed a gloomy determination.

"Then," said he when de Wardes had finished, "you believe that he is dead?"

"Alas! yes."

"And you fought without seconds?"

"He would have it so."

"That is strange!"

"How! what mean you by strange?"

"Yes; it is so very unlike M. de Guiche; that is not his disposition."

"You do not doubt my word I hope?"

"Hum! hum!"

"You do doubt it then?"

"A little. But I shall doubt it still more, I warn you, if I find my poor friend dead."

"Monsieur Manicamp!"

"Monsieur de Wardes!"

"It appears to me that you are insulting me."

"Be that as you will. What would you. I have never liked men who would come and say to you, I have killed M. so and so in a corner; it is a great misfortune, but I killed him fairly. It is a very dark night for such an adverb, M. de Wardes."

"Silence! we have reached the spot."

And in fact they were just getting into the small opening, and in the empty space was a dead horse. At a short distance from the horse, on the dark grass, with his face towards the ground, the poor count was lying bathed in blood.

He had remained on the same spot, and did not appear to have made the slightest movement. Manicamp threw himself upon his knees, raised the count in his arms, and found him cold, his clothes saturated with blood. He laid him down again. Then he crept about searching around him until he had found de Guiche's pistol.

"By heaven!" cried he, rising, pale as a spectre, the pistol in his hand, "by heaven! you were not mistaken, and he really is dead."

"Dead!" repeated de Wardes.

"Yes, and his pistol is still loaded," added Manicamp, having felt the priming in the pan.

"Why, did I not tell you that I fired as he was advancing upon me, and at the moment he was aiming at me?"

"Are you quite sure that you really did fight with him, M. de Wardes? For my own part I am very much afraid that it was not so, and that you assassinated him. Oh! there is no occasion for your calling out so loudly. You fired your three shots and his pistol is still loaded. You killed his horse and then Guiche, and he one of the best shots in all France, did not hit either you or your horse. Really, M. de Wardes, you were most unfortunate in bringing me here; all this blood has risen to my head; it has made me almost drunk, and I believe upon my honor, as such an opportunity presents itself, that I shall blow out your brains. M. de Wardes, recommend your soul to God!"

"Surely, M. de Manicamp, you cannot think of it?"

"On the contrary, I think of it but too much."

"Would you assassinate me?"

"Without remorse; at all events for the moment."

"Are you a nobleman?"

"I have been a page, therefore I have given proof of my nobility."

"Then allow me to defend my life."

"A pretty request truly; that you may serve me as you have served poor Guiche."

And Manicamp raised his pistol, pointed it at de Wardes' breast, with his arm extended and a frowning brow.

De Wardes did not even attempt to fly; he was paralyzed.

During this terrific silence of a moment, which to de Wardes appeared an age, a sigh was heard.

"Oh!" exclaimed de Wardes, "he lives! he lives! help Monsieur de Guiche, or I shall be assassinated!"

Manicamp drew back, and between the two young men the Count de Guiche raised himself upon one arm, though with great difficulty.

Manicamp threw the pistol ten paces from him, and ran up to his friend with a cry of joy.

De Wardes wiped his forehead, which was inundated with a cold, ice-like perspiration.

"It was time!" murmured he.

"Where are you hurt?" said Manicamp to Guiche, "and in what way were you wounded?"

De Guiche held up his mutilated hand, and pointed to his bleeding breast.

"Count!" cried de Wardes, "I am accused of having assassinated you; speak, I conjure you, say that I fought loyally."

"That is true," replied de Guiche, "M. de Wardes has fought loyally, and whoever asserts the contrary, will make me his enemy."

"Oh! sir," cried Manicamp, "assist me in the first place to remove my poor friend from this, and after that I will give you every satisfaction you may demand. Or, if you are in great haste, let us do better. Let us staunch the count's wounds with your handkerchief and mine, and since there are two shots still remaining, let us fire them."

"I thank you," said de Wardes, "but twice within one hour I have seen death too near. Death is but a

hideous monster and I prefer accepting your apologies."

Manicamp laughed, and so did Guiche notwithstanding the great pain he endured.

Manicamp and de Wardes wished to carry him, but he declared that he felt strong enough to walk alone. The ball had broken the third and little finger of his right hand, and then had struck against a rib without passing through into his chest. It was, therefore, the great pain he suffered, rather than the serious nature of his wound which had made Guiche faint.

Manicamp put his arm round de Guiche's shoulder, and de Wardes did the same on the other side, and they conducted him in this way to Fontainebleau, and there took him to the house of the physician who had attended the death-bed of the Franciscan, the predecessor of Aramis.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE KING'S SUPPER.

WHILE all these events were occurring, the king had seated himself at table, and the small number of his suite invited on that day had seated themselves also, after the usual gesture made by the king on such occasions, permitting them to do so.

Even at that period, although the points of etiquette had not been regulated as they were subsequently, the court of France had completely broken through the traditional good humor and patriarchal affability which existed still during the days of Henri IV., and which the suspicious mind of Louis XIII. had little by little effaced to substitute to them habits of ostentatious grandeur, which he was much annoyed at not being able effectually to attain.

The king dined, therefore, at a small separate table, which was raised, like the desk of a president, above all the neighboring ones. We said a small table; we must, however, hasten to add that this small table was the largest of the whole.

Moreover, it was upon this table that a most prodigious number of dishes were heaped containing fish, game, meat dressed in various manners, vegetables, fruit, and preserves.

The king, young and vigorous, a great sportsman and addicted to all

violent exercises, had, besides all this, the warmth natural to the blood of all the Bourbon race, which gives them such excellent digestions, and constantly renews the appetite.

Louis XIV. was a redoubtable bon-vivant, he liked to criticise his cooks: but when he did them honor that honor was gigantic.

The king began his dinner by eating several sorts of soups, whether mixed together in a sort of Macedonian or separately. He mingled, or rather separated each sort of soup with a glass of old wine.

He eat quickly, and rather eagerly.

Porthos, who from the first had from respect been waiting for a sign from d'Artagnan's elbow, seeing the king getting on so furiously, turned towards the mousquetaire, and in a half whisper,

"It appears to me," said he, "that one may give a loose to one's appetite; the king's example is encouraging; only look."

"The king eats" said d'Artagnan, "but he talks at the same time; you must eat in such a way that should it by chance happen that the king addresses you, he must not catch you with your mouth so full that you cannot immediately reply to him, which would not be very graceful."

"The surest way then," said Porthos, "would be not to sup at all; however, I am hungry, and that I acknowledge to you, and all these dishes have so savory an odor that they excite at once my sense of smell, and my appetite."

"Do not take it into your head not to eat at all, you would displease his majesty. The king has an axiom which he repeats frequently, it is, 'he works well who eats well,' and he does not like that any one should have a mincing appetite at his table."

"But how can a man avoid having his mouthful when he is eating?"

"All you have to do," replied the captain of the mousquetaires, "is to swallow at once, should the king speak to you, whatever you may have in your mouth."

"Oh! very well."

And from that moment Porthos set to work to eat with polite enthusiasm.

The king from time to time cast a glance over the company, and as a connoisseur appreciated the gastronomic disposition of his guest.

"Monsieur du Vallon!" cried he, suddenly.

Porthos had attacked a delicious

salmi of hare, and had just popped one half of the back of it into his mouth.

His name being thus pronounced made him start, and by a vigorous effort he at once bolted the whole mouthful.

"Sire!" replied Porthos, in a half choked voice, but nevertheless sufficiently intelligible.

"Let these fillets of lamb be passed on to M. du Vallon," said the king; "do you like young meat, Monsieur du Vallon?"

"Sire, I like every thing," replied Porthos.

And d'Artagnan prompted him.

"All that your majesty is pleased to send me."

Porthos repeated these words.

The king made a sign of satisfaction with his head.

"Who eats well works well," rejoined the king, delighted at having opposed to him an eater of Porthos' power.

Porthos received the dish of lamb, and put a portion of it on his plate.

"Well?" said the king.

"Exquisite!" said Porthos very calmly.

"Have you as good lamb in your province?" continued the king.

"Sire," replied Porthos, "I believe that in my province, as in every other, the best of every thing is in the first place for the king. But I will also observe that I do not eat lamb in the same way that your majesty does."

"Ah! ah! how then do you eat it?"

"Usually, I have a lamb dressed whole."

"Whole!"

"Yes, sire."

"And in what manner?"

"I will explain. My cook—the fellow is a German, sire—my cook first stuffs the lamb with sausages, which he gets from Strasbourg—white puddings, which he gets from Troyes—with larks, for which he sends to Pithiviers; and by some means or other he manages to bone this lamb as he would a fowl, leaving the skin of the animal intact, which forms a juicy crust around it. When this is cut in handsome slices, as would be done with an enormous sausage, there issues from it a rosy-colored gravy, which is agreeable to the eye and exquisite to the palate."

And Porthos smacked his lips.

The king opened his eyes widely with delight; and while attacking some

pheasants *à la daube*, which were presented to him:

"That is a dish that I should covet," said he; "what, a whole lamb?"

"Yes, sire, whole."

"Pass these pheasants to M. du Vallon. I see he is an amateur."

The order was executed.

Then returning to the lamb.

"And is it not too fat?"

"No, sire, the fat falls at the same time as the juice, and swims upon the top; then my carver skims it off with a silver spoon, which I had made for the purpose."

"And you live?" inquired the king.

"At Pierrefonds, sire?"

"At Pierrefonds; and where is that, M. du Vallon? somewhere near Belle-Isle?"

"Oh! no, sire; Pierrefonds is in the province of Soissons."

"I thought you had mentioned these lambs to me on account of the salt-marshes."

"No, sire; I have meadows that salt water never touches, but which are no less valuable."

The king then passed on to the side-dishes, but without losing sight of Porthos, who continued exercising his knife and fork with the same vigor.

"You have an excellent appetite, M. du Vallon, and you are a good guest."

"Ah! sire, if your majesty should ever come to Pierrefonds we would eat our lamb between us, for your appetite does not fail you either."

D'Artagnan gave to Porthos a good kick under the table.

Porthos blushed.

"At your majesty's happy age," said Porthos, in order to make amends for his blunder, "I was in the mousquetaires, and then my appetite was never satisfied. Now, your majesty has a fine appetite, as I had the honor to say just now, but you select with too much delicacy ever to be called a large eater."

The king appeared charmed with the politeness of his antagonist.

"Will you taste these creams?" said he to Porthos.

"Sire, your majesty treats me too well to allow me to say any thing but the truth to you."

"Say on, M. du Vallon, say on."

"Well, sire; in regard to sweet dishes, I only tolerate pastry, and even then it must be tolerably compact."

All these creams and frothy dishes swell up the stomach, and occupy a space which is too precious to be so ill-occupied."

"Ah! gentlemen," said the king, pointing to Porthos, "here is the true model of gastronomy; it was thus that our forefathers used to eat, who knew so well how to eat," added his majesty, "while we, we only nibble."

And saying these words, he took a dish of breasts of fowl, interspersed with ham.

Porthos, on his side, plunged a spoon into a pasty of partridges and land-rails.

The cup-bearer joyously filled his majesty's glass.

"Give some of my wine to the baron," said the king.

This was one of the greatest honors that could be conferred at the royal table.

D'Artagnan pressed his friend's knee.

"If you can only manage to swallow one half of that wild boar's head which I see yonder, said d'Artagnan, "I think you will be a duke and peer in less than twelve months."

"By-and-by," said Porthos phlegmatically, "I will attack it."

And the turn of the boar's head soon came; for the king, taking pleasure in exciting this hearty guest, did not pass any dish to him which he had not himself tasted. He therefore tasted the boar's head. Porthos showed himself a staunch trencherman; and, instead of eating the half, as d'Artagnan had advised, he eat three-fourths of it.

"It is impossible," said the king, in a half whisper, "that a gentleman who sups so well every night, and with such fine teeth, can be other than the most honest man in my kingdom."

"Do you hear that?" said d'Artagnan, whispering in his friend's ear.

"Yes: I think I am rather in favor," said Porthos, balancing himself in his chair.

"Oh! you have the wind right aft! Yes! yes! yes!"

The king and Porthos continued to eat in this way to the great satisfaction of the guests, some of whom from emulation had endeavored to keep up with them, but were obliged to halt half way.

The king's face began to redden, and this reaction of the blood announced approaching repletion. It was in those moments that Louis XIV. instead of becoming lively, as most

topers do, became gloomy and taciturn.

Porthos, on the contrary, became playful and social.

D'Artagnan's foot warned him more than once to be cautious.

The dessert was put on table.

The king was no longer thinking of Porthos; he frequently turned his eyes towards the door of the banqueting-room, and he was heard several times to ask why M. Saint Aignan so long delayed coming.

At length when his majesty was just finishing a plate of preserved plums, which he did with a heavy sigh, M. de Saint Aignan made his appearance.

The eyes of the king, which had by degrees become dull, instantly brightened up. The count advanced towards the king's table, and on his approach the king rose.

All the guests rose—even Porthos, who was at that moment finishing some nougat of sufficient tenacity to glue together the jaws of a crocodile.

The supper was ended.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

AFTER SUPPER.

THE king took Saint Aignan's arm and went into the next room.

"How long you have been, count!" said the king.

"I had to bring the answer, sire," replied the count.

"It took her then a long time to reply to that which I had written."

"Sire, your majesty had deigned to write in verse. Mademoiselle de la Vallière wished to repay the king in the same coin, that is to say, in gold."

"Verse, Saint Aignan!" exclaimed the king, "give, give."

And Louis broke the seal of a small letter, that did in fact contain verses, which history has preserved for us, and of more value for their intention than for their composition.

Such as they were, however, they perfectly enchanted the king, who testified his joy by transports that were in nowise equivocal; but the general silence warned Louis, who was so punctilious in regard to decorum, that his joy might give rise to some interpretation.

He turned round and put the note into his pocket, then taking a step or

two which brought him back to the threshold of the banquet-room, and near his guests,

"Monsieur du Vallon," said he, "it is with the most lively pleasure that I have seen you, and it will be with increased pleasure that I shall again see you."

Porthos bowed as the Colossus of Rhodes might have done, and left the room, keeping his face turned towards the king.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," continued the king, "you will await my orders in the gallery. I am obliged to you for having presented M. du Vallon to me."

"Gentlemen, to-morrow I return to Paris, for the departure of the ambassadors of Spain and Holland.

"Therefore, we meet again to-morrow."

The room was soon vacated. The king took Saint Aignan's arm, and made him again read over to him the verses written by la Vallière.

"What think you of them?"

"Charming, sire."

"In fact they do charm me, and if they were known—"

"Oh! the poets would be jealous of them; but they will not see them."

"Did you give her those I wrote?"

"Oh! sire, she absolutely devoured them."

"I fear they were but feeble."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière did not so consider them."

"You think then that she found them to her taste?"

"I am certain of it, sire."

"I must then answer her."

"Oh! sire—what, instantly—after supper—it would fatigue your majesty."

"I believe you are right—study after a repast is injurious."

"The study of a poet above all; and at this moment Mademoiselle de la Vallière's mind must be pre-occupied,"

"Pre-occupied—with what?"

"Ah! sire, as is the case with all the ladies of the court."

"And by what?"

"On account of the accident which has happened to poor Guiche."

"Ah! good heaven! has any misfortune happened then to Guiche?"

"Yes, sire; one of his hands is mutilated and he has a hole through his chest; he is dying."

"Good God! and who told you this?"

"Manicamp carried him just now to a physician's house at Fontainebleau, and the news is now spread abroad throughout the palace."

"Carried him! poor Guiche! and how did all this happen?"

"Ah! that is the question, sire, how all this has happened."

"You say all this with a most singular air, Saint Aignan. Give me the particulars. What says he?"

"Oh! he says nothing, sire, but the others—"

"What others?"

"Those who brought him back, sire."

"And who are they?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows. M. de Manicamp is one of his friends."

"As is all the world," said the king.

"Oh! no," rejoined Saint Aignan, "you are mistaken, sire; every body is not precisely the friend of M. de Guiche."

"How know you that?"

"Is it the king's will I should explain?"

"Assuredly it is my will."

"Well then, sire, I believe I heard something of a quarrel between two gentlemen."

"When?"

"This very evening, before your majesty's supper."

"That proves nothing. I have issued such severe ordinances against duelling, that no one, I imagine, would dare to contravene them."

"Therefore, heaven preserve me from excusing any one!" exclaimed Saint Aignan; "your majesty has ordered me to speak, I speak."

"Say then how it was the Count de Guiche was wounded."

"Sire, it is said, while on the watch for game."

"This evening?"

"This evening."

"A hand blown off! a hole in the chest! who went out after game with M. de Guiche?"

"I know not, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows, or ought to know."

"You are concealing something from me, Saint Aignan."

"Nothing, sire, nothing."

"Then explain this accident to me; was it a gun that burst?"

"It is very likely. But when I reflect again, sire, it could not be, for a pistol was found lying near Guiche, and it was still charged."

"A pistol! why no one would go to lie in wait for game with a pistol, at least so it seems to me."

"Sire, it is further said that de Guiche's horse was killed, and that the dead horse is still lying in the opening in the wood."

"His horse! Guiche goes to lie in wait for game on horseback. Saint Aignan, I cannot comprehend a word of what you are saying. And where did this happen?"

"In the wood of Rôchin, sire, in the circular clearing."

"Very well. Call M. d'Artagnan."

Saint Aignan obeyed. The mousquetaire came in.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, "you will go out by the door at the bottom of the private staircase."

"Yes, sire."

"You will mount your horse."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will go to the round clearing in the Rôchin wood. Do you know the place?"

"Sire, I have fought there twice."

"How!" exclaimed the king, somewhat astounded at the answer.

"Sire, under the edicts of his Eminence the Cardinal de Richelieu," replied d'Artagnan, in his usual phlegmatic manner.

"That is a different matter, sir. You will go there, and you will carefully examine the locality. A man has been wounded there, and you will find a dead horse there. You will tell me what you think of this event."

"I will, sire."

"It is not necessary to say that it is your opinion I require, and not that of others."

"You shall hear it in an hour, sire."

"I forbid you from communicating with any one whomsoever."

"Excepting the man who will have to give me a lantern," said d'Artagnan.

"Oh! that is understood," said the king, laughing at this freedom, which he tolerated only in his captain of mousquetaires.

D'Artagnan went down the private staircase.

"And now, call my physician," added Louis.

In ten minutes the king's physician came in, completely out of breath.

"Sir," said the king to him, "you will go with M. de Saint Aignan to the place where he will conduct you, and you will give me an account of

the precise state of a sick man, whom you will see in the house to which I now request you to proceed."

The physician obeyed, without making any observation, as was then beginning to be the custom with regard to any order given by Louis XIV., and he left the room, preceding Saint Aignan.

"You, Saint Aignan, send Manicamp to me, and before he has any opportunity of speaking to the physician."

Saint Aignan then withdrew.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

HOW D'ARTAGNAN FULFILLED THE COMMISSION INTRUSTED TO HIM BY THE KING.

WHILE the king was making these arrangements, in order to ascertain the truth, d'Artagnan, without losing a moment, ran to the stables, unhooked a lantern, saddled a horse himself, and proceeded towards the place to which the king had directed him.

He had not, according to his promise, either seen or met any one, and as we have said above, he had carried his scruples so far, as to saddle his horse without the intervention of any groom or stable boy.

D'Artagnan was one of those who on important occasions take a pride in doubling their own value.

In five minutes gallop he was at the wood, tied up his horse to the nearest tree, and then walked on foot towards the clearing.

He then examined with his lantern in his hand the whole surface of the circular opening, measured, examined, and, after a good hour's exploration, he quietly remounted his horse, and returned, at a foot pace and deeply meditating, to Fontainebleau.

Louis was waiting for him in his cabinet; he was alone, and was writing with a pencil some lines of very unequal length, and which appeared to have been effaced and written over again and again.

D'Artagnan concluded that these lines must be verses.

The king raised his head, and on perceiving the captain of the mousquetaires,

"Well, sir," said he, "do you bring me any news?"

"Yes, sire."

"What have you seen?"

"These are the probabilities, sire," said d'Artagnan.

"It was a certainty that I had requested of you."

"I will come as near to one as I well can. The weather was in a favorable state for investigations of the nature of the one I have just made; it had rained this evening and the ground was somewhat moist."

"To the facts, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Sire, your majesty has told me that there had been a horse killed in the opening in the Rôchin wood. I began by inspecting the roads. I say the roads, because there are four roads which centre in this opening. The one I took was the only one that presented fresh traces of horses' feet. Two horses had followed it side by side. Their eight feet were very distinctly impressed on the clayey soil. One of the cavaliers appears to have been in a greater hurry than the other; the paces of the one were continually in advance of the other half a length."

"Then you are positive there were two persons, and that they went together?" said the king.

"Yes, sire. The horses were two large animals of equal paces; horses accustomed to manœuvre, for they turned in a perfectly oblique manner the barrier of the opening."

"And then, sir?"

"There the cavaliers had remained some instants, no doubt to regulate the conditions of the combat; the horses became impatient. One of the cavaliers spoke, the other listened and merely replied. His horse was pawing the ground, which proves that from his being occupied in listening he had slackened the bridle."

"Then there was actually a combat?"

"Incontestably."

"Continue; you are a skilful observer."

"One of the two cavaliers remained at the spot where they had halted; it was the one who had listened; the other crossed the opening and had placed himself at first in face of his antagonist at the other extremity of the opening. Then, he who had remained rode at a gallop about two-thirds of the whole length of the clearing, believing that he was advancing against his enemy, but the latter had followed the circumference of the wood."

"You are ignorant of their names, are you not?"

"Altogether, sire. But he that followed the edge of the wood rode a black horse."

"How do you know that?"

"Some hairs from his tail remained upon the brambles growing on the edge of the ditch."

"Go on."

"As to the other horse I had not much difficulty in obtaining his description, since he was left dead upon the field of battle."

"And of what did this horse die?"

"Of a ball that went through his head."

"Was it a ball from a pistol or from a gun?"

"From a pistol, sire. Moreover, the wound explained to me the tactics of the person who had fired the shot. He had rode round the edge of the wood in order to take his adversary in flank, for I also traced his horse's foot-marks upon the grass."

"The foot-marks of the black horse?"

"Yes, sire."

"Go on, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Now that your majesty comprehends the position of the two adversaries, I must leave the cavalier who is stationary to return to the one who is galloping on."

"Do so."

"The horse of the cavalier who was thus charging was killed outright."

"How do you know that?"

"The cavalier had not time to alight and fell with the horse. I saw the traces of his leg which he had drawn, and with considerable effort, from under the dead animal. The spur having the whole weight of the horse upon it had dug into the ground."

"Very well; and what did he when he got up again?"

"He walked straight towards his adversary."

"Who still remained stationary on the edge of the wood?"

"Yes, sire; and when he had come within a good pistol shot distance, he stopped and stood firmly: I saw the imprint of his two heels close to each other; he fired, and missed his adversary."

"How can you know that he missed him?"

"I found his hat pierced with a ball."

"Ah! a proof!" cried the king.

"Insufficient, sire," coldly replied

d'Artagnan; it is a hat without any initial, without arms, a red plume such as every body wears—the lace even has nothing peculiar about it.”

“And the man whose hat was thus knocked off, did he fire a second shot?”

“Oh! sire, his two shots had been already fired.”

“How did you discover that?”

“I found the wadding of the pistols.”

“And the ball, which did not kill the horse, what became of it?”

“It cut the feather in the hat of the person against whom it was directed, and then cut down a young birch tree on the opposite side of the clearing.”

“Then the man on the black horse was disarmed while his adversary had still a shot in reserve.”

“Sire, while the dismounted cavalier was getting up the other reloaded his weapon. Only he was much agitated while doing this, for his hand trembled.”

“How could you ascertain that?”

“One half of the charge fell on the ground, and he threw away the ramrod, not having time to replace it.”

“Monsieur d'Artagnan!” exclaimed the king, “this is altogether marvelous.”

“It is merely observation, sire, and the poorest scout would do as much.”

“The scene is before one's eyes from merely hearing what you have said.”

“I have in fact reconstructed it in my mind, and it must have passed nearly in that way.”

“Now let us return to the dismounted cavalier. You were saying that he had advanced upon his adversary while the latter was reloading his pistol.”

“But at the moment that he was aiming the other fired.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the king, “and with what effect?”

“The effect was terrible, sire; the cavalier fell upon his face after staggering three steps.”

“Where had he been wounded?”

“In two places: first, in the right hand; and by the same shot, in the chest.”

“But how can you possibly guess this?” inquired the king, struck with admiration.

“Oh! that was plain enough. The stock of the pistol was covered with blood; and upon it can be traced the course of the ball, with small fragments of a broken ring forced into it.” The wounded man will most probably

have had the third and little finger carried off.”

“That I agree is accounting for the hands; but for the chest?”

“Sire, there were two pools of blood at the distance of two feet and a half from each other; near one of these pools the grass was torn up by a convulsed hand: at the other, the grass was merely flattened down by the weight of the body.”

“Poor Guiche!” exclaimed the king.

“Ah! it was M. de Guiche!” said the mousquetaire, tranquilly. “I had imagined that, but did not dare to say so to your majesty.”

“And how was it that you imagined it?”

“I had perceived the arms of the Grammont family on the holsters of the dead horse.”

“And you believe him to be dangerously wounded?”

“Very dangerously, because he fell immediately on being shot, and remained for a long time in the same spot. He was, however, able to walk, on leaving the place, supported by two friends.”

“Then you met him as he was coming away?”

“No; but I discovered the footsteps of three men. The man on the right hand and the one on the left walked freely and with ease, but he in the middle had a heavy, dragging step, besides which traces of blood accompanied these steps.”

“Now, sir, that you have seen the combat so closely that none of its details have escaped you, tell me two words as to Guiche's adversary.”

“Oh! sire, I do not know him.”

“You, who see every thing so plainly.”

“Yes, sire, I see all, but I do not tell all that I see; and since the poor devil has escaped, your majesty will allow me to say that I am not the person to inform against him.”

“And yet, sir, that man is a culprit who fights a duel.”

“Not in my eyes, sire,” said d'Artagnan coldly.

“Sir!” cried the king, “do you know what you are saying?”

“Perfectly well, sire; for in my eyes, do you see, a man who fights well is a worthy man, that is my opinion: you may have another—that is very natural; you are the master.”

“Monsieur d'Artagnan! I have however ordered—”

D'Artagnan interrupted the king with a respectful gesture.

"You ordered me to go in search of information with regard to a combat. Sire, I have brought that information. Should you order me to arrest M. de Guiche's adversary I should obey; but do not order me to name him, for on that occasion I should not obey."

"Well, then, arrest him."

"Please to name him to me, sire."

Louis stamped his foot. Then after a moment's reflection,

"You are right," said he; "right in every sense."

"That is my opinion, sire; I am happy that it is also your majesty's."

"One word more; who was it that went to Guiche's assistance?"

"Of that I am also ignorant."

"But you spoke of two men: there were then seconds?"

"There were no seconds; and more than this, immediately after M. de Guiche had fallen his adversary fled without even tendering him assistance."

"The miserable wretch!"

"Why, sire, it is the effect of your ordinances. A man has fought gallantly, he has escaped death once. He remembers M. de Bouteville—the deuse!"

"And he becomes cowardly?"

"No, he becomes prudent."

"So that he fled?"

"Yes, and as fast even as his horse could carry him!"

"In what direction?"

"In that of the palace."

"And then—"

"And then, as I had the honor to inform your majesty, two men came on foot and led away M. de Guiche."

"What proof have you that these men came after the combat?"

"A manifest proof. At the moment the combat took place the rain ceased, the ground had not then had time to absorb it, and it was still humid. Footsteps sank deep into it, but after the combat, and during the time that M. de Guiche had fainted and remained unconscious, the ground had become again solid and footsteps were less deeply imprinted upon it."

Louis clapped his hands together in token of his admiration.

"M. d'Artagnan," said he, "you are indeed the most skilful man in my whole kingdom."

"So thought M. de Richelieu, and so said M. de Mazarin, sire."

"And now remains to be seen

whether your sagacity has not been mistaken."

"Oh! sire, a man may be mistaken, *errare humanum est*," philosophically said the mousquetaire.

"Then you do not appertain to humanity, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for I believe that you are never mistaken."

"Your majesty said but now 'it remains to be seen.'"

"Yes."

"And how so, if it please you?"

"I have sent for M. de Manicamp, and M. de Manicamp will soon be here."

"And M. de Manicamp knows the secret?"

"Guiche has no secrets for M. de Manicamp."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"There was no one present at the combat, and that I repeat; and unless, indeed, M. de Manicamp was one of the two men who took him away—"

"Hush!" said the king, "for here he comes. Remain there, and lend an attentive ear."

"Very well, sire," said the mousquetaire.

At the same moment Manicamp and Saint Aignan made their appearance.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE LYING IN WAIT.

THE king made a sign to the mousquetaire and another to Saint Aignan.

These signs were imperious and signified "On your lives say not a word."

D'Artagnan withdrew into a corner of the room, like a soldier into his sentry-box.

Saint Aignan as a favorite leaned over the back of the king's chair.

Manicamp, with his right leg foremost, a smile upon his lips, his white hands gracefully clasped together, advanced to make his obeisance to the king.

The king returned the salutation with an inclination of the head.

"Good evening, M. de Manicamp," said he.

"Your majesty has done me the honor to command my attendance," said he.

"Yes, to be informed by you of all the details of the unhappy accident which has befallen the Count de Guiche."

"Oh! sire, it is most grievous."

"Were you there?"

"Not precisely, sire."

"But you reached the scene of this accident a few moments after it had occurred?"

"Exactly; yes, sire, in about half an hour afterwards."

"And where did this accident take place?"

"I believe, sire, that the place is called the Ring of Rôchin wood."

"Yes—a hunting rendezvous."

"Precisely so, sire."

"Well, relate to me all the details which have come to your knowledge of this misfortune, Monsieur de Manicamp—relate."

"But perhaps your majesty is already informed upon the subject, and I should fear to fatigue you by repetition."

"No, you need not fear that."

Manicamp looked around him: he saw only D'Artagnan, leaning his back against the wainscoting—d'Artagnan, calm, kind, good-natured—and Saint Aignan, with whom he had come, and who remained leaning over the back of the king's arm-chair, with a face equally smiling and agreeable.

He therefore determined to speak out.

"Your majesty is aware," said he, "that disasters are not unfrequent in the chase."

"In the chase?"

"Yes, sire, I mean to say when lying in wait for game."

"Ah! ah!" said the king, "it was while lying in wait that the accident occurred."

"Why, yes, sire," Manicamp ventured to reply, "was your majesty ignorant of that?"

"Or nearly so," said the king, quickly—for it was always repugnant to Louis XIV. to utter a falsehood—"it was, then, while lying in wait, that the frightful accident took place?"

"Alas! it was unfortunately so, sire."

The king paused.

"Lying in wait for what description of game?" inquired he.

"The wild boar, sire."

"And what could have induced Guiche to have gone alone in this way to lie in wait for a wild boar? It is an occupation for a country sportsman, and fit only, at all events, for people who have not, like the Marshal de Grammont, a pack of hounds and huntsmen, to hunt like gentlemen."

Manicamp raised his shoulders.

"Youth is rash, sire," said he, sentimentally.

"Well, proceed," said the king.

"But so it was," continued Manicamp—not daring to venture too far, and placing one word cautiously after the other, as a sportsman does his feet when crossing a boggy marsh—"so it was, sire, that poor Guiche went alone to lie in wait for the wild boar."

"And alone! think of that! the fine sportsman, truly! does not Guiche know that the wild boar turns when he is wounded?"

"And that is precisely what did happen, sire."

"He had then been informed that the animal was there."

"Yes, sire, some country people had seen it in their fields."

"And a boar of what age?"

"A hog-steer, sire."

"You ought then to have forewarned me, sir, that Guiche intended committing suicide; for, in short, I have seen him hunt, and an expert huntsman I have thought him. When he fires at a boar at bay, having the hounds close on him, he nevertheless takes every precaution, and even then he shoots with a rifle: and on this occasion he goes out alone to attack a wild boar, and merely armed with pistols!"

Manicamp started.

"Pistols of magnificent workmanship, excellent to fight a duel with a man, but not with a wild boar."

"Sire, there are things which are altogether inexplicable."

"You are right; and the event which now occupies our attention is one of that nature. Proceed."

During this conversation, Saint Aignan, who had, perhaps, at first, made some sign to Manicamp, was intimidated by the king, who kept his eyes obstinately fixed upon him.

There was consequently no chance for any further communication between him and Manicamp.

As to d'Artagnan, the statue of silence at Athens was more noisy and more expressive than he.

Manicamp, being once fairly launched, continued to run headforemost into the snare.

"Sire," said he, "this is probably the way in which the thing was brought about. Guiche waited for the wild boar."

"On horseback or on foot?" inquired the king.

"On horseback; he fired at the boar and missed him."

"The clumsy fellow!"

"The boar rushed upon him."

"And the horse was killed."

"Ah! your majesty knows that?"

"I have been told that a horse was found dead in Rôchin wood. I presumed that it must be Guiche's horse."

"It was so, in fact, sire."

"That accounts for the horse; that's very well—but Guiche?"

"Guiche, having fallen to the ground, was gored by the wild boar, and wounded in the hand and in the chest."

"It was a horrible accident, indeed, but it must be allowed it was Guiche's fault. How can any man think of lying in wait for a wild boar with pistols! He had forgotten, surely, the fable of Adonis."

Manicamp rubbed his ear.

"It was, in truth," said he, "highly imprudent."

"Can you, yourself, imagine it, Monsieur de Manicamp?"

"Sire, that which is written, is written."

"Ah! you are a fatalist."

Manicamp was agitated and very ill at ease.

"I am displeased with you, Monsieur de Manicamp."

"With me, sire?"

"Yes. How! you, the friend of de Guiche—you know that he is subject to such fits of folly, and you do not prevent him!"

Manicamp was completely dumb founded: the king's tone was no longer precisely that of a man who implicitly believes.

On the other hand that tone had neither the severity of displeasure nor the persistence of an interrogatory.

There was more of raillery in it than menace.

"And you say, then," continued the king, "that it was really Guiche's horse that was found dead?"

"Oh! most assuredly; yes, sire."

"Did that astonish you?"

"No, sire. At the last hunt, your majesty will remember the circumstance, M. de Saint Maure had a horse killed under him in the same manner."

"Yes; but ripped up?"

"Undoubtedly, sire."

"Had Guiche's horse been ripped up as M. de Saint Maure's was, it would not have astonished me in the least."

Manicamp opened his eyes widely.

"But that which does astonish me," continued the king, "is that de Guiche's horse, instead of being ripped open, should have his head broken."

Manicamp became confused.

"Can I be mistaken?" added the king. "Was it not in the upper part of the head that de Guiche's horse was wounded? Acknowledge, M. de Manicamp, that the blow was very extraordinary."

"Sire, you know that the horse is a very intelligent animal, he will have attempted to defend himself."

"But a horse defends itself with its hind legs, and not with its head."

"Then the horse being terrified must have fallen down," said Manicamp, "and the wild boar, sire,—you understand, sire,—the wild boar—"

Oh! yes, I understand as to the horse; but as to the cavalier—"

"Well, that is plain enough; the boar turned from the horse to attack the rider, and as I have already had the honor to tell your majesty, crushed de Guiche's hand at the moment he was about to fire at him his second shot, and then with a thrust of his tusk made a hole in his chest."

"It is impossible that any thing can be more probable; in truth, Monsieur de Manicamp, you do wrong to mistrust your eloquence, for you relate admirably."

"The king is very kind," said Manicamp, making a very confused bow.

"From this very day I shall forbid my gentlemen going to lie in wait for game. The dense! I might almost as well allow duelling."

Manicamp again started, and made a motion to withdraw.

"Is the king satisfied?" he demanded, in a humble tone,

"Delighted; but do not withdraw yet, M. de Manicamp," said Louis, "I have still some business with you."

"Well, well," thought d'Artagnan, "here is another one who cannot vie with us."

And he heaved a sigh which might have been interpreted.

"Oh! where are now the men who could be compared to us?"

At that moment an usher raised the tapestry covering the door, and announced the king's physician.

"Ah!" cried Louis, "here in good time comes M. Vallot, who has just been visiting M. de Guiche; now we shall have news as to the state of the wounded man."

Manicamp felt much more uncomfortable than ever.

"In this way, at least, we shall have ascertained all we could," said the king.

And he looked at d'Artagnan, who moved not a muscle.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE PHYSICIAN.

M. VALLOT entered the study.

The parties were still in the same relative positions. The king seated, Saint Aignan still with his elbows on the back of the king's chair, d'Artagnan still leaning against the wall, Manicamp still standing a few paces from the king's chair.

"Well Monsieur Vallot," said the king, "have you obeyed my order?"

"With all diligence, sire."

"Did you go to the house of your brother practitioner at Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, sire."

"And you found M. de Guiche there?"

"I there found M. de Guiche."

"In what condition? Speak out frankly."

"In a very deplorable state, sire."

"But come, now, speak out. The wild boar has not devoured him?"

"Devoured whom?"

"Guiche."

"What wild boar?"

"Why the wild boar which wounded him."

"Has M. de Guiche been wounded by a wild boar?"

"It is so said, at least."

"Some poacher rather."

"What mean you by a poacher?"

"Some jealous husband, some disappointed rival intending to avenge himself, may have fired at him."

"But how can this be, Monsieur Vallot, are not M. de Guiche's wounds inflicted by the tusks of a wild boar?"

"The wounds of M. de Guiche were caused by a pistol ball which has broken the third and fourth fingers of his right hand, after which it lodged in the intercostal muscles of his right side."

"A ball say you! are you positive de Guiche was wounded by a ball?" exclaimed the king with well feigned surprise.

"Indeed," replied Vallot, "so certain am I of the fact, that here it is."

And he presented to the king a half flattened ball.

The king looked at it without touching it.

"And he had that in his chest, poor fellow?" demanded he.

"Not precisely. The ball had not penetrated; it had become flattened, either by the scroll guard of the pistol, or on the sternum."

"Good God!" said the king seriously, "you did not tell me a word of all this, M. de Manicamp."

"Sire—"

"What is all this; this invention of a wild boar—of lying in wait—this night hunting—come now, speak?"

"Oh! sire—"

"It appears that you were right," said the king turning toward his captain of mousquetaires, "and that there has really been a duel."

Manicamp darted a look of bitter reproach at the mousquetaire.

D'Artagnan understood the look, and would not remain under the weight of such an accusation.

He advanced a step or two.

"Sire," said he, "your majesty ordered me to explore the circular opening in the Rôchin wood, and to tell him according to my opinion what had taken place there. I have communicated my observations without naming any one. It was his majesty who first named the count de Guiche."

"Very well, very well, sir," said the king haughtily, "you have done your duty, and I am satisfied with you, that ought to suffice. But you, Monsieur de Manicamp, you have not done yours, you have lied."

"Lied, sire, the word is harsh."

"Find another then."

"Sire, I shall not seek for one. I have already had the misfortune to displease your majesty, and what I think most befitting, is to humbly bow down before the reproaches you may be pleased to address to me."

"You are right, sir, I am always displeased when the truth is concealed from me."

"Sometimes, sire, one may be ignorant of it."

"Do not lie farther, or I shall double the penalty."

Manicamp bowed, turning pale.

D'Artagnan advanced another step, determined on interfering if the still increasing anger of the king should outstep certain limits.

"Sir," continued the king, "you see that it is useless any longer to deny the fact, M. de Guiche has fought a duel."

"I do not say the contrary, sire, and your majesty would have been generous in not compelling a gentleman to utter an untruth."

"Compelling! who compelled you?"

"Sire, Monsieur de Guiche is my friend. Your majesty has forbidden duelling under pain of death. A lie saves my friend's life—I lie."

"Right," murmured d'Artagnan, "this is a capital fellow, *mordieux!*"

"Sir," rejoined the king, "instead of lying, you should have prevented his fighting."

"Oh! sire, your majesty who is one of the most accomplished gentlemen in France, knows full well, that we men of the sword, have never considered M. de Bouteville as dishonored from his having died on the Place de Grève; that which dishonors a man is avoiding his enemy, and not his falling by the hands of the headsman."

"Well, be it so," said Louis XIV., "I will offer you the opportunity of repairing every thing."

"If it be one such as would become a gentleman, I would seize it with avidity, sire."

"The name of M. de Guiche's adversary."

"Oh! oh!" murmured d'Artagnan, "are we going to follow the footsteps of Louis XIII.?"

"Sire!" cried Manicamp in a tone of reproach.

"You will not name him to me it appears," said the king."

"Sire, I do not know him."

"Bravo!" cried d'Artagnan.

"Monsieur de Manicamp, surrender your sword to the captain."

Manicamp bowed gracefully, unbuckled his sword smiling, and presented it to the mousquetaire.

But Saint Aignan advanced hurriedly between d'Artagnan and Manicamp.

"Sire," said he, "with your majesty's permission—"

"Speak on," said the king, perhaps delighted in his heart that some one had thrown himself between him and his anger, which he had allowed to overcome him.

"Manicamp you are a noble fellow, and the king will appreciate your conduct; but to wish to serve our friends too well is to do them injury. Mani-

camp you know the name that his majesty asks of you."

"It is true, I do know it."

"Then you will give it."

"Had it been right to give it, I should have already done so."

"Then I will tell it—I who am not like you interested for this valiant man."

"You, you are free to do so, but still it appears to me—"

"Oh! a truce to magnanimity, I will not allow you to be carried off to the Bastille in this way—speak, or I speak."

Manicamp was a man of talent, and understood that he had done enough to raise himself in the esteem of all men; the only question now was to persevere in it in such a manner as to recover the king's favor.

"Speak, sir," said he to Saint Aignan, "I have done on my side all that my conscience has dictated to me, and it was needful for my conscience to command me loudly," added he turning towards the king, "since it prevailed even over the commands of his majesty; but his majesty will pardon me, I hope, when he knows that I had to preserve the honor of a lady."

"Of a lady?" demanded the king anxiously.

"Yes, sire,"

"A lady was the cause of this combat?"

Manicamp bowed.

The king advanced towards Manicamp.

"If the person should be of consequence," said he, "I should not complain, on the contrary."

"Sire, all that appertain to your majesty's household, or to the household of your brother, are of consequence in my eyes."

"To the household of my brother!" repeated Louis XIV., hesitating, "the cause of this duel is a lady belonging to my brother's household?"

"Or to that of Madame."

"Oh! of Madame?"

"Yes, sire."

"Then, this lady—"

"Is one of the maids of honor of the household of her royal highness, Madame, the duchess of Orleans."

"For whom de Guiche fought?"

"Yes, and this time I no longer lie."

Louis was much agitated and confused.

"Gentlemen," said he, turning to the spectators of this scene, "will you withdraw for a few moments, I wish to

be alone with M. de Manicamp; I know that he has some matters to reveal to me which are important to his justification, and which he dare not speak of before witnesses. Put on your sword again, M. de Manicamp.

Manicamp replaced his sword in his belt.

"The fellow has decidedly great presence of mind," murmured d'Artagnan, taking Saint Aignan's arm, and withdrawing with him.

"Oh! he will get himself out of it," whispered the latter into d'Artagnan's ear.

"And with honor, Count."

Manicamp addressed to d'Artagnan and Saint Aignan a look of thanks, which was not perceived by the king.

"Well, well," said d'Artagnan, as they crossed the threshold of the door, "I had but a poor opinion of the rising generation—well, I was mistaken, and these little young fellows have some good stuff in them."

Vallot had preceded the favorite and the captain.

The king and Manicamp remained alone in the cabinet.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN ACKNOWLEDGES THAT HE WAS WRONG, AND THAT MANICAMP WAS RIGHT.

THE king assured himself, by going to the door, that no one was listening, and he precipitately returned and placed himself near Manicamp.

"And now that we are alone, Monsieur de Manicamp," said he, "explain yourself."

"With the greatest candor, sire," replied the young man.

"And, in the first place," added the king, "know that I have nothing so much at heart as the honor of the ladies."

"And that was precisely the reason I was so cautious not to wound your delicacy, sire."

"Oh! yes, I understand it all now. You say, then, that it regards one of my sister-in-law's maids of honor, and that the person in question, Guiche's adversary, the man, in short, whom you will not name—"

"But whom M. de Saint Aignan will name to you, sire."

"Yes; you say then, that this man

has insulted some one attached to Madame."

"Yes, sire, Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Ah!" cried the king, as if he had expected the blow, although it seemed to pierce him to the heart, "Ah! it is Mademoiselle de la Vallière who has been insulted."

"I do not precisely say, sire, that she has been insulted."

"But in fine?"

"I say that she was spoken of in terms that were not proper."

"In terms that were not proper, with regard to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and you refuse to tell me who was the insolent—"

"Sire, I had believed that this matter had been agreed upon, and that your majesty had renounced the idea of making me an informer."

"That is just, and you are right," said the king, moderating his anger "moreover, I shall learn soon enough the name of him whom I shall be compelled to punish."

Manicamp saw clearly that the question had assumed a completely different aspect.

As to the king, he perceived that he had allowed himself to be carried a little too far.

And therefore he checked himself.

"And I will punish him, not only because Mademoiselle de la Vallière is brought in question, although I particularly esteem her, but because the object of the quarrel was a woman. Now I pretend that at my court women shall be respected, and that there shall be no quarrelling."

Manicamp bowed.

"Now, let us see, Monsieur de Manicamp," continued the king, "what has been said of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"But does not your majesty divine that?"

"Who, I?"

"Your majesty is well aware of the nature of the jests which young men permit themselves to make."

"They said, no doubt, that she loved some one," the king ventured to observe.

"It is probable."

"But Mademoiselle de la Vallière has the right to love whomsoever she thinks proper," said the king.

"It is precisely what Guiche maintained."

"And it is on that account he fought?"

"Yes, sire, for that cause alone."

The king blushed.

"And," said he, inquiringly, "do you know nothing more?"

"On what head, sire?"

"Why on the very interesting head which you have but now been speaking of."

"And what is it then that the king thinks I ought to know?"

"Why, for instance, the name of the man whom la Vallière loves, and whom Guiche's adversary denied that she had the right to love."

"Sire, I know nothing, I heard nothing, did not even see any thing; but I hold Guiche to be a man of noble heart, and if he momentarily substituted himself as the protector of la Vallière, it was that her protector was of too elevated a station to personally undertake her defence."

These words were more than transparent, and, in fact, they made the color mount to the king's cheeks, but this time it was with pleasure.

He gently tapped Manicamp on the shoulder.

"Come, come, you are not only a young man of talent, Monsieur de Manicamp, but also a courageous gentleman, and I find your friend Guiche a knight errant completely to my mind. You will testify this to him, will you not?"

"Therefore, sire, your majesty is pleased to pardon me?"

"Completely."

"And I am free?"

The king smiled and held out his hand to Manicamp.

Manicamp seized his hand and kissed it.

"And besides you have the talent of relating matters marvellously well."

"Who I, sire?"

"You gave me an excellent description of the accident which has happened to poor Guiche. I see the wild boar rushing out of the wood; I see the horse prostrate on the ground; I see the infuriated animal turning from the horse to the cavalier. You do not merely relate sir, you absolutely paint."

"Sire, I believe that your majesty deigns to laugh at me."

"On the contrary," said Louis XIV. seriously, "I am so little disposed to laugh that it is my wish that you should relate this adventure to the whole world."

"The adventure of the wild boar?"

"Yes, and in the way you related it

to me, without changing even a single word. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, sire."

"And you will relate it?"

"Without losing a single minute."

"Well, then, go yourself and call in M. d'Artagnan. I hope that you are no longer afraid of him?"

"Oh! sire, when assured of the good will of my king I no longer fear any one."

"Call him, then," said the king.

Manicamp opened the door.

"Gentlemen," said he, "the king calls for you."

D'Artagnan, Saint Aignan, and Vallot came in.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "I have called for you to tell you that the explanation given by M. de Manicamp has completely satisfied me."

D'Artagnan cast a glance on the one side to Vallot, and on the other to Saint Aignan which signified,

"Well, what did I say to you?"

The king drew Manicamp towards the door, and then, in a whisper, said:

"Tell M. de Guiche to be careful of his health, and, above all, tell him to recover quickly. I will hasten to thank him in the name of all the ladies; but, above all, let him never venture on such an affair again."

"Even were he to face death a hundred times, he would brave it still a hundred times whenever your majesty's honor is concerned."

This was direct; but, as we have before said, Louis XIV. was fond of incense, and provided it was offered to him, he was not very exacting as to its quality.

"Tis well, 'tis well," said he, dismissing Manicamp, "I will see Guiche myself, and I will make him listen to reason."

Manicamp backed out of the room.

Then the king turned towards the other gentlemen present.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said he.

"Sire?"

"Tell me then, sir, how can it have happened that your sight this evening has been so obscured, you who generally have such good eyes?"

"My sight has been obscured, sire?"

"Unquestionably."

"It must be so, undoubtedly, since your majesty says it is so; but how have they been obscured, if you please?"

"Why, with regard to this event in Rôchin wood."

"Ah! ah!"

"Undoubtedly, you saw the foot marks of the horses; you recognized the footsteps of two men; you had drawn up the details of a combat. Nothing of all this has existed; pure illusion!"

"Ah! ah!" again exclaimed d'Artagnan.

"As well as the pawings of a horse, those indications of a struggle, were the struggle of Guiche with a wild boar; nothing more, only that the struggle was long and terrible as it appears."

"Ah! ah!" continued d'Artagnan.

"And when I think that for a moment I gave credit to such a fallacy. But, indeed, you spoke with so much positiveness—"

"In fact, sire, my sight must have been strangely dimmed," said d'Artagnan with so much good humor that it delighted the king.

"You acknowledge it then?"

"Good heaven! sire, can you ask if I acknowledge it?"

"So that now you clearly see the matter?"

"Quite differently to what I saw it only half an hour ago."

"And you attribute this difference in your opinion—"

"To a very simple cause, sire. Half an hour ago I was returning from Rôchin wood where I had to light me but a miserable stable lantern."

"While now?"

"Now I have before me all the wax lights of your cabinet, and, moreover, the king's two eyes, which give as much light as two suns."

The king began to laugh, and Saint Aignan absolutely roared with laughter.

"The same thing has happened to M. Vallot," said d'Artagnan, preventing the king from speaking, "he had imagined not only that M. de Guiche had been wounded, but that he had actually extracted that very ball from his chest."

"By my faith," said Vallot, "I acknowledge—"

"That you actually believed it," rejoined d'Artagnan.

"That is to say," said Vallot, "not only that I believed it, but at this moment I would swear to it."

"Well, then, my dear doctor, you have dreamed all this."

"I have dreamed?"

"The wound of M. de Guiche is a dream; the ball a dream; therefore believe me, do not say a word about it."

"Well said!" observed the king; "the advice which d'Artagnan has

given you is sage advice. Speak no more of your dream to any one, Monsieur Vallot, and on the honor of a gentleman, you shall have no cause to repent it. Good evening, gentlemen—oh! 'tis a frightful thing to lie in wait for a wild boar!"

"'Tis a frightful thing to lie in wait for a wild boar!" reiterated d'Artagnan in a loud voice.

And he repeated these words in every room that he passed through.

And he left the palace, taking Vallot with him.

"Now that we are alone," said the king to Saint Aignan, "what is the name of Guiche's adversary?"

Saint Aignan looked at the king.

"Oh! do not hesitate," continued the king; "you know well that I must pardon him."

"Wardes," said Saint Aignan.

"'Tis well."

Then going into his own sleeping room, hurriedly—

"To pardon is not to forget"—said Louis XIV.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

SHOWING THAT IT IS WELL TO HAVE TWO STRINGS TO YOUR BOW.

MANICAMP left the king's apartments, quite joyful at having succeeded so well; when, on reaching the foot of the staircase, and passing before a door-way, he suddenly felt himself caught by the sleeve.

He turned round, and recognizing Montalais, who had been waiting for his passing by, and who mysteriously, with outstretched neck and in a whispering voice, said to him:

"Sir, come quickly, I beg of you."

"And where to, mademoiselle?" inquired Manicamp.

"In the first place, a true knight would not have addressed such a question to me; he would have followed me without requiring any explanation whatsoever."

"Well, then, mademoiselle, I am ready to conduct myself as a true knight."

"No, it is too late now, and you shall not have the merit of it. We are going to Madame; come."

"Ah! ah!" cried Manicamp. "Well, let us go to Madame."

And he followed Montalais, who ran before him as light as Atalanta.

"On this occasion," said Manicamp to himself, while following his guide, "I do not think that sporting adventures will precisely suit. We will try, however, and in case of need—no matter, in case of need—we must find something else."

Montalais continued running on.

"How very fatiguing it is," thought Manicamp, "to have occasion to use one's wits and one's legs at the same moment."

At length they reached Madame's apartments.

Madame had finished her toilette for the night. She was in an elegant dishabille; but it could be readily understood that this toilette had been completed before she had been subjected to the emotion by which she was then agitated.

She was waiting with visible impatience.

And therefore was it that Montalais and Manicamp found her standing near the door.

On hearing the sound of their footsteps she had gone so far to meet them.

"Ah!" cried she, "at last!"

"Here is M. Manicamp," replied Montalais.

Madame made a sign to Montalais to withdraw: the young girl obeyed.

Madame followed her with her eyes until the door had closed, and then turning to Manicamp:

"What has happened, and what is this I have been told, Monsieur de Manicamp?" said she; "there has been some one wounded in the palace?"

"Yes, madam, unfortunately, M. de Guiche."

"Yes, M. de Guiche," repeated the princess. "I had, in fact, heard it mentioned, but not affirmed. Thus, it is really true, that it was to M. de Guiche that this misfortune happened?"

"To himself, madam."

"Are you aware, Monsieur de Manicamp, that the king has an antipathy to duels?"

"Certes, madam; but a duel with a wild beast comes not within his majesty's jurisdiction."

"Oh! you will not do me the injustice to imagine that I will give credit to that absurd fable which has been propagated, for I know not what purpose, by which it is pretended that M. de Guiche has been wounded by a wild boar. No, sir the truth is known;

and at this moment, besides the misfortune of being wounded, M. de Guiche is exposed to the risk of being deprived of liberty."

"Alas! madam," said Manicamp, "I know that but too well; but what can be done?"

"You have seen his majesty?"

"Yes, madam."

"What did you tell him?"

"I related to him how M. de Guiche had gone out to lie in wait for game; how a wild boar had rushed out of Rôchin wood; how M. de Guiche had fired at him; and how, in fine, the animal had turned upon the sportsman, had killed his horse, and had severely wounded him."

"And the king believed it all?"

"Perfectly."

"Oh! you surprise me, Monsieur de Manicamp, you surprise me much."

And Madame walked up and down the room, every now and then casting an interrogating glance on Manicamp, who remained motionless and impassible on the spot which he had selected on entering the room.

At length she paused.

"And yet," she said, "every one agrees in giving a totally different cause to this sad wound."

"And what cause, madam?" cried Manicamp; "may I without indiscretion address this question to your highness?"

"And you ask this; you, the intimate friend of M. de Guiche; you, his confidant!"

"Oh! madam, the intimate friend, yes; the confidant, no. Guiche is one of those men who may have secrets—who even have them—but who confide them to no one. Guiche is discreet, madam."

"Well then, the secrets which M. de Guiche shuts up in his own breast, it will fall to my lot to have the pleasure of revealing to you," said the princess with much vexation, "for, in truth the king may question you a second time, and if you should then tell him the same tale, he might not perhaps be altogether pleased."

"But, madam, I believe that your royal highness is in error with regard to the king. His majesty was well satisfied with me, I swear to you."

"Then you will allow me to say to you, Monsieur de Manicamp, that this proves but one thing, and that is, that his majesty is very easily satisfied."

"I believe that your highness

wrong in adhering to that opinion, for his majesty is well known to admit of none but good reasons."

"And do you think that he will be greatly pleased with your gratuitous falsehoods, when he shall be informed that M. de Guiche had espoused a quarrel on behalf of M. de Bragelonne his friend, and which quarrel led to a hostile meeting?"

"A quarrel on behalf of M. de Bragelonne!" exclaimed M. de Manicamp with the most ingenuous air imaginable, "what is it that your royal highness does me the honor to acquaint me with?"

"And what is there astonishing in that? M. de Guiche is very susceptible, irritable, and very easily allows himself to be carried away by anger."

"I hold on the contrary, madam, M. de Guiche to be very patient; he is never susceptible or irritable but with the most just motives."

"Is not then friendship a just motive?" said the princess.

"Oh! certes, madam, and above all to a heart like his."

"Well then, M. de Bragelonne is a friend of M. de Guiche; you will not deny that fact?"

"A very dear friend."

"Well, M. de Guiche espoused the cause of M. de Bragelonne, and as M. de Bragelonne was absent and could not fight for himself, he fought for him."

Manicamp began to smile, and made two or three motions with his head and shoulders, which were equivalent to—

"Oh! if you will absolutely have it so—"

"But, finally," cried the princess out of patience, "will you speak?"

"Who, I?"

"Undoubtedly; it is evident that you are not of my opinion, and that you have something to say."

"I have only to say one single word."

"Say it then."

"It is, that I do not comprehend one single word of what you have done me the honor to relate to me."

"How! you do not comprehend a word as to the quarrel between M. de Guiche and M. de Wardes?" said the princess almost irritated.

Manicamp was silent.

"A quarrel," continued she, "which arose from a more or less ill-natured,

and more or less well founded, assertion as to the virtue of a certain lady."

"Ah! of a certain lady, that is quite another affair," said Manicamp.

"You are beginning to understand, are you not?"

"Your highness will excuse me, but I do not dare—"

"You do not dare!" said Madame exasperated, "well, wait a moment, and you will see that I will dare!"

"Madam! madam!" exclaimed Manicamp as if he were alarmed, "be cautious as to what you are about to say."

"Ah! it seems that were I a man, you would insist on fighting with me, despite the edicts of his majesty, as M. de Guiche has done with M. de Wardes, and that in defence of the virtue of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Of Mademoiselle de la Vallière!" cried Manicamp, starting back with almost a jump, and as if he were perfectly amazed at hearing that name mentioned.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Monsieur de Manicamp, that you should start back thus terrified," said the princess ironically, "would you have the impertinence to doubt this virtue?"

"But there is not the slightest question in all this as to the virtue of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"How! when two men have blown each other's brains out for a woman, you say that she has nothing whatever to do with it, and that there is no question with regard to her. Ah! I did not believe you so complete a courtier, Monsieur de Manicamp."

"Your pardon, madam," said the young man, "but we are getting very wide of the mark. You do me the honor to speak to me in one language, while I, it would appear, am speaking in another."

"What said you?"

"Your pardon, but I thought I understood you to say that Messieurs de Guiche and de Wardes had fought for Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Why, yes."

"For Mademoiselle de la Vallière I think you said," repeated Manicamp.

"Why, good heaven! I did not mean to say that M. de Guiche was interested for the person of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I say that he had interested himself for her by procuration."

"By procuration?"

"Come, now, do not put on these terrified airs. Is it not well known here that M. de Bragelonne is affianced to Mademoiselle de Vallière, and that on setting out to fulfil the mission to London which the king had confided to him, he had charged his friend, M. de Guiche, to watch over this interesting person."

"Ah! I will not say a word more, your highness is so well informed."

"Of every thing, and forewarn you that I am so."

Manicamp began to laugh, a conduct which almost exasperated the princess, who, as we already know, had not a very enduring temper.

"Madam," rejoined the discreet Manicamp, bowing to the princess, "we had better bury this affair altogether, for it will never be perfectly cleared up."

"Oh! as to that there is nothing more to be done, for it is clear as daylight. The king will know that M. de Guiche has espoused the cause of this little adventuress, who assumes the airs of a great lady; he shall know that M. de Bragelonne named as his guardian in ordinary of this garden of the Hesperides his friend M. de Guiche, the latter gave the required snap at the Marquis de Wardes, who had dared to lay his hand upon the golden apple. Now you cannot but know, Monsieur de Manicamp, you who are so well informed on every subject, that the king also covets the famous treasure, and that he will not be altogether pleased that M. de Guiche should have constituted himself the guardian of it. Are you now sufficiently enlightened, or do you require any thing further? Speak, demand."

"No, madam, no; I will know nothing further."

"Know, however, for it is necessary you should know this, Monsieur de Manicamp, know that his majesty's indignation will be followed up by dreadful consequences. With princes of such a disposition as the king, their amorous anger is a hurricane."

"Which you will appease; yes, you, madam."

"What I?" exclaimed the princess, with violent ironical expression, "I, indeed, and on what ground?"

"Because you are an enemy to every species of injustice, madam."

"And it would be an injustice in your opinion, then, to prevent the king from carrying on his amors."

"You will, notwithstanding, intercede in favor of M. de Guiche."

"Oh! now you are becoming absolutely insane, sir," said the princess, in her most haughty tone.

"On the contrary, madam, I never was more soundly sane, and I repeat to you that you will defend Monsieur de Guiche should it be necessary."

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you."

"And why so?"

"Because Monsieur de Guiche's cause is your cause, madam," said Manicamp, in a half whisper, but very energetically, his eyes flashing at the same moment.

"What mean you?"

"I mean, madam, that I am astonished that in the name of la Vallière brought forward by M. de Guiche in this defence of his friend, Bragelonne, your royal highness has not divined a pretext."

"A pretext?"

"Yes."

"But a pretext for what?" repeated the princess, stammering, for Manicamp's eyes had revealed to her the real state of the case.

"And now, madam," said the young man, "I have said enough, I presume, to induce your royal highness not to overwhelm poor de Guiche by irritating the king against him, for upon him will fall all the enmity of a certain party much opposed to you."

"You would on the contrary say, for so it appears to me, that all those who do not like Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and even some who like her, will be indisposed towards the count."

"Oh! madam, can you push obstinacy so far as this, and will you not open your ears to the words of a devoted friend? Must I expose myself to the risk of displeasing you? Must I in spite of myself name the person who was the real cause of this disastrous quarrel?"

"The person!" exclaimed Madame, blushing.

"Must I," continued Manicamp, "present to you poor Guiche, irritated, furious, exasperated, with all the rumors circulated in regard to that person? Must I, if you continue obstinately to refuse to recognize her, and should respect continue to prevent my naming her, must I recall to you the scenes between Monsieur and the Duke of Buckingham, the insinuations which were so current as to the exile of the

duke? Must I retrace to you the endeavors of the count to please; to watch over, to protect that person, for whom alone he breathes? Well, then, I will do so; and when I shall have reminded you of all this, perhaps you will understand that the count, having exhausted all his patience, worried for a long time past by de Wardes, at the first disobliging word uttered by him against the person in question, took fire, and resolved to be revenged."

The princess hid her face in her hands.

"Sir! sir!" she cried, "do you know what you are now saying, and to whom you are addressing it?"

"Then, madam," pursued Manicamp, as if he had not heard the exclamation of the princess, "nothing will further astonish you, neither the count's ardor in seeking this quarrel, nor his marvellous address in transferring it to a question foreign to your interests. That, above all, is prodigious as to adroitness and self command, and if the person for whom the Count de Guiche, and for whom, in reality, he has shed his blood, owes some gratitude to the poor wounded man, it is not really on account of the blood he has lost, the agonizing sufferings he has endured, but for the method he adopted to save that honor, more precious to him than his own."

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame, as if she had been alone, "then it was really for me!"

Manicamp could now take breath—he had courageously gained time for a few moments' pause.

Madame, on her side, remained some time plunged in painful meditation. Her agitation could be divined from the precipitate heavings of her chest, and from the languor of her eyes, and her frequently pressing her hand to her heart.

But with her coquetry was not an inert passion; it was, on the contrary, a fire which sought for elements and found them.

"Then," said she, "the count will have obliged two persons at one and the same time; for M. de Bragelonne also owes M. de Guiche a great debt of gratitude, and so much the greater as it will every where and always be said that Mademoiselle de la Vallière has been defended by this generous champion."

Manicamp understood that some grains of doubt were still lurking in

the breast of the princess, and his mind was irritated by this pertinacity on her part.

"A grand service, in sooth," said he, "has he rendered to Mademoiselle de la Vallière; a fine service has he rendered to M. de Bragelonne! This duel will be so much bruited abroad that it will half dishonor this young girl; and these reports will necessarily cause a coolness between her and the viscount. The conclusion of all this is that M. de Wardes' pistol shot has produced three results instead of one: it kills at once the reputation of a woman, the happiness of a man, and perhaps has mortally wounded one of the most gallant gentlemen in France. Ah! madam, your logic is of a very cold description; it condemns always, but never absolves."

These last words of Manicamp dispelled the last doubt which had remained, not in the heart, but in the mind of Madame. She was no longer either the princess with her scruples, or the woman with returns of jealous feeling. She was all heart, a heart which had just felt the profound coldness of a wound.

"Mortally wounded!" murmured she, in a palpitating voice. "Oh! Monsieur de Manicamp, did you not say mortally wounded?"

Manicamp replied only by a deep sigh.

"You therefore say that the count is dangerously wounded?" continued the princess.

"Why, madam, he has one hand mutilated and a ball in his chest.

"My God! my God!" cried the princess, with feverish excitement; "this is dreadful, M. de Manicamp. A hand mutilated, say you, a ball in his breast! Gracious heaven! and it was that vile fellow—that wretch—that assassin de Wardes, who has done this! Decidedly, heaven is no longer just."

Manicamp appeared to be a prey to violent emotion; he had, in fact, exhibited much energy in the latter part of his pleading.

As to Madame she sought no longer to restrain or conceal her feelings; she thought no more of the observances of her high station; when passion in her bosom turned either to anger or sympathy nothing could arrest its impulse.

Madame approached Manicamp, who had just allowed himself to drop into

a chair, as if grief was a sufficiently powerful excuse for committing so flagrant an infraction of the laws of etiquette.

"Sir," said she, taking his hand, "be frank."

Manicamp raised his head.

"Is Monsieur de Guiche," continued Madame, "in imminent danger?"

"In two ways, madam. In the first place, on account of the hemorrhage which has declared itself, an artery in the hand having been wounded; and in the second, from the wound in his chest, which, so the doctor fears at least, has injured some essential organ."

"Then he may die?"

"Die! yes, madam, and that without even the consolation of knowing that you had been informed of his devotedness."

"You will tell him that."

"Who, I?"

"Yes—are you not his friend?"

"No, madam, not I—I will not say that to M. de Guiche, should he even be in a state to listen to me. I will only tell him that which I have seen—your cruelty towards him."

"Sir! ah! you would never commit such a barbarity?"

"Oh! yes I would, madam. I would tell him the truth; for nature is powerful in a man of his age. Physicians are skilful, and if perchance the poor count should survive his wounds, I would not that he should remain exposed to dying from a wounded heart after having escaped those of the body."

After pronouncing these words Manicamp rose and with profound respect appeared about to take leave.

"At least, sir," said Madame, stopping him with an almost suppliant air, "you will have the goodness to tell me in what state the invalid now is. Who is the physician that attends him?"

"He is very ill, madam—so much for his state: as to his physician, it is the king's own physician, M. Vallot, who is assisted by the doctor to whose house M. de Guiche had been carried."

"How! he is not in the palace?" said Madame.

"Alas! madam, the poor fellow was in so pitiable a state that he could not be transported so far as this."

"Give me the address, sir," said the princess, eagerly, "I will send to inquire after him."

"Rue du Feurre, a brick house with

white window shutters, the doctor's name is painted on the door."

"Are you returning to your wounded friend, Monsieur de Manicamp?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then you will be able to render me a service."

"I am at your highness' orders."

"Do as you were about to do; return to your friend, and send away all the attendants, and have the goodness to withdraw also."

"Madam—"

"Do not let us lose time in useless explanations. What I shall do is this, and do not imagine that you see in it more than I tell you. I am about to send one of my women, perhaps two on account of the lateness of the hour. I should not wish them to see you, or, to speak more frankly, I should not wish you to see them. These are scruples which you will comprehend, you above all, Monsieur de Manicamp, who divine every thing."

"Oh! madam, perfectly. I can even do better than that. I will walk before your messengers, it will be a means of pointing out the way to them, and to protect them, should they, contrary to all probability, stand in need of protection."

"And also, they could get into the house without any difficulty whatever, could they not?"

"Certes, madam, for by going in first I could remove any difficulties that might exist."

"Well then, go, go, Monsieur de Manicamp, and wait at the bottom of the staircase."

"I will, madam."

"Stay!"

Manicamp stopped.

"When you shall hear the steps of two women descending the staircase, go out and proceed, without looking back, to the house where the poor count is lying."

"But should it chance that two other persons were to descend, and I should be deceived by it?"

"They shall clap their hands gently three times."

"'Tis well, madam."

"Go, go."

Manicamp having reached the door, and bowed for the last time, then left the room, his heart transported with joy. He was fully assured that the presence of Madame was the most sovereign balm that could be applied to the wounds of his suffering friend

A quarter of an hour had not elapsed when the noise of a door, opened and closed again with much precaution, reached his ears, then he heard light steps gliding down the staircase, then three claps of the hand, that is to say the signal which had been agreed upon.

He immediately left the house, and, faithful to his word, directed his steps without once turning his head, through the streets of Fontainebleau, and soon reached the abode of the doctor.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

M. MALICORNE KEEPER OF THE ARCHIVES
OF THE KINGDOM OF FRANCE.

Two women, enveloped in ample cloaks, their faces concealed with half masks of black velvet, timidly followed the steps of Manicamp.

On the first story of the house, behind red damask curtains, shone the soft light of a lamp placed upon a sideboard.

At the opposite end of the room, and in a bed with twisted columns, closed in with curtains similar to those which softened the light of the lamp, reposed Guiche, his head raised on double pillows, his long and curling black hair lying in disorder upon them, formed a striking contrast with his white forehead, his eyes bewildered by a thick mist.

It could be perceived that fever was the principal guest within this room.

Guiche was dreaming. His mind was following amid darkness one of those delirious dreams, such as God sends, when on the road to death, to those who are about to fall into the strange universe of eternity.

Two or three spots of still liquid blood stained the floor.

Manicamp hurriedly ascended the staircase; he stopped only when he reached the threshold of the door, which he gently pushed open, put his head into the room, and observing that all was quiet, he advanced on tiptoe towards a large leathern arm-chair, a sample of the furniture of the times of Henry IV. Seeing that the nurse was, as is customary with those persons, fast asleep in this chair, he awoke her, and requested her to go into an adjoining room.

Then he remained standing for an instant near the bed asking himself

whether he should awaken Guiche to inform him of the good news.

But as from outside the door, he began to hear the rustling of the silk gowns, and the palpitating breathing of the companions of his walk, as he saw the tapestry that hanged before the door raised with impatience, he noiselessly retired to join the nurse in the next room.

Then, at the same moment that he disappeared, the drapery was raised, and the two women entered the room he had just left.

She who had first entered made an imperious gesture to her companion, which nailed her to a seat close to the door.

She then advanced resolutely towards the bed, drew back the curtain on its iron rod, and threw its folds behind the head of the bed.

She then saw the pallid face of the count; she saw his right hand enveloped with snow white linen, extended on the dark pattern of the counterpane which partly covered this bed of pain.

She shuddered on beholding a spot of blood which was increasing its dimensions on the linen.

The white chest of the young man was uncovered, as if the coolness of the night would aid his breathing. A small bandage confined the dressings of his wound, around which a blue circle, caused by the extravasated blood, had formed.

A profound sigh escaped the lips of the young woman. She leaned against the column of the bed, and through the openings of her mask observed this heart-rending spectacle.

A hoarse and noisy breathing issued, like the death rattle, from between the clenched teeth of the count.

The masked lady seized the left hand of the wounded man.

That hand was burning as a living coal.

But at the moment that the ice-like hand of the lady was placed upon it, the action of the cold was such that Guiche opened his eyes, and endeavored to return to consciousness by gazing at the lady, who was the first object that met his eye, standing like a phantom beside the column of his bed.

On seeing her his eyes dilated, but intelligence did not illuminate her pure spark in his mind.

Then the lady made a sign to her companion, who had remained near

the door. Doubtless the latter had been taught her lesson, for in a firm and unhesitating voice she pronounced the following words:

"My lord count, her royal highness, Madame, wished to be informed how you had borne the pain arising from your wounds, and to testify to you, through me, the great regret she experienced in knowing you thus suffering."

At the word Madame, Guiche made a movement; he had not yet remarked the person to whom the voice belonged.

He therefore naturally turned towards the spot whence this voice proceeded.

But as the icy hand still remained clasped in his, he turned his eyes once more on the motionless phantom that stood beside him.

"Was it you that spoke to me, madam," said he in a faint voice, "or is there another person with you in this chamber?"

"There is," replied the phantom, in a voice that was scarcely audible, and bowing her head.

"Well!" cried the wounded man with a great effort, "thanks! Say to Madame that I no longer regret dying, since she has remembered me."

At this word dying, pronounced by an apparently dying man, the masked lady could not restrain her tears, which were streaming through her mask, and appeared upon her cheeks, on the place where that mask ceased to conceal them.

Had Guiche had more command over his senses, he would have seen them breaking in brilliant pearls, and falling on his bed.

The lady, forgetting for the moment that she wore a mask, raised her hand to her eyes to wipe them, and meeting with the cold and lifeless velvet, she angrily tore it off and threw it on the floor.

At this unexpected apparition, which seemed to him as if issuing from a cloud, Guiche uttered a cry, and stretched out his arms.

But his words expired upon his lips, as did his strength.

His right hand, which had followed the impulsion of his will, without calculating its degree of power, fell back upon the counterpane, and the linen was stained with a now rapidly increasing spot.

And during this time the eyes of the young man became again dim, and then closed, as if he had begun his

last struggle with the unconquerable angel of death.

Then, after some involuntary movements, his head remained motionless upon the pillow.

Only from being pale, he had become actually livid.

The lady was alarmed; but on this occasion, contrary to its usual effects, terror was attractive.

She bent down over the young man, warming with her breath that cold and discolored face, which she almost touched; then she affixed a rapid kiss on Guiche's left hand: who, moved, as by an electric shock, awoke for a moment, opened his vacant eyes widely, and again fell into a deep swoon.

"Let us go," said she to her companion; "we must not remain here: I should commit some folly."

"Madam! Madam! your royal highness is leaving your mask," said the vigilant companion.

"Pick it up," replied the mistress, gliding heart-broken down the staircase.

And as the street door had remained half open, the two light-footed birds rushed through it, and with rapid steps regained the palace.

One of the two ladies went up to Madame's apartments, where she disappeared.

The other entered the apartments of the maids of honor; that is to say the *entre-sol*.

When she had reached her room she seated herself before a table; and without giving herself time to take breath, she wrote the following note:

"This evening Madame has been to see M. de Guiche.

"Every thing is going on marvelously well in that quarter.

"Do all you can on your side, and above all burn this paper."

Then she folded the letter in a long shape; and leaving her room with much precaution, she crossed a corridor which led to the rooms of the gentlemen in the service of Monsieur.

There she stopped before a door; under which, after giving two sharp knocks, she slipped the paper, and then fled rapidly.

On returning to her own room, she carefully removed all traces of her having left it, and of her having written.

Amid the investigation to which she was devoting her mind, with the intention we have just mentioned, she perceived on the table the mask which

Madame had worn, and which she had brought away in conformity with her mistress' order, but which she had omitted to return to her.

"Oh! oh!" said she, "do not let us forget to do to-morrow what I have forgotten to do to night."

And she took the mask by its velvet cheek, and feeling her thumb wet, she looked at it.

It was not only wet but red.

The mask had fallen upon one of the spots of blood, which, as we have before stated, stained the floor of de Guiche's room, and from the black surface with which it had accidentally come in contact, the blood had soaked through, and stained the white lining of the mask.

"Oh! oh!" said Montalais, for our readers have no doubt recognized her from all the manoeuvres we have described, "I will not return her this mask at all; it has become too precious now."

And rising, she ran to a small casket of maple wood, which contained several articles for the toilette and perfumery.

"No, no, not here even. Such a relic is not to be abandoned thus to a mischance."

Then, after a moment's pause, and with a smile which appertained peculiarly to herself.

"Fine mask!" added Montalais, "stained with the blood of that brave knight, thou shalt be added to our collection of marvels, the letters of la Vallière, those of Raoul, all that amorous collection in short, which will some day form the history of royalty. Thou shalt be deposited with M. Malicorne," continued the mad girl laughing, as she began to undress herself, "who believes that he is only master of the apartments to Monsieur, and whom I make keeper of the archives and historiographer of the house of Bourbon, and the chief houses of the kingdom.

"Let him complain now, that grumbling Malicorne."

And she closed her curtains and fell asleep.

Fontainebleau, just as the clock was striking eleven, the king descended the great staircase, with the queens and Madame to get into his carriage, to which were harnessed six magnificent horses, who were pawing the ground at the foot of the grand entrance.

All the court was waiting in the horse shoe in their travelling dresses, and it was a brilliant spectacle to see the number of saddle horses, of equipages, of men and women, surrounded by their officers, their valets, and their pages.

The king handed the two queens into the carriage, and then stepped in himself.

Monsieur did the same with Madame.

The maids of honor imitated this example, and took their seats two by two in the carriages which had been allotted to them.

The king's carriage led the way, after that came Madame's, then the others according to etiquette.

The weather was warm; a slight breeze had in the morning appeared to promise to refresh the atmosphere, but it was soon heated by the sun, though concealed by clouds, and could not penetrate through the hot vapor which arose from the ground; but as a scorching wind which whirled the finer particles of dust from the road and cast it in the faces of the travellers.

Madame was the first to complain of the heat.

Monseigneur replied by throwing himself back in the carriage as about to faint, and he inundated himself with salts and perfumed waters, sighing most piteously all the time.

Then Madame said to him in her most gracious tone.

"In truth, sir, I had thought you more gallant, and had expected in such hot weather as this, that you would have left me my carriage to myself, and have performed the journey on horseback."

"On horseback!" exclaimed the prince with an accent of affright, which showed at once how far he was from acceding to this strange proposal, "on horseback! you surely could not think of it, madam, all my skin would crumble off from the contact of this burning wind."

Madame laughed.

"You can take my parasol," said she.

"And the trouble of holding it?" replied Monsieur with the greatest

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE JOURNEY.

THE following day having been fixed for the departure of the court from

composure, "moreover I have no horse."

"How! no horse," retorted the princess, who as she could not gain the isolation she desired, at all events enjoyed the pleasure of teasing, "no horse! you are in error, sir, for I see under your favourite bay."

"My bay horse!" exclaimed the prince endeavoring to effect a movement towards the carriage door, but which so much inconvenienced him, that when but half accomplished, he hastened to resume his immobility.

"Yes," said Madame, "your bay horse led by M. de Malicorne."

"Poor animal!" replied the prince, "how hot he will be."

And after these words he closed his eyes, like a man about to expire.

Madame, on her side, indolently stretched herself in the other corner of the calash, and closed her eyes also, not to sleep, but that she might reflect at her ease.

The king, however, sitting on the fore seat of his carriage, having given up the back one to the two queens, experienced that vexation and annoyance felt by anxious lovers, who, always without ever slaking their eager thirst for the sight of the beloved object, approach it and then separate from it half satisfied, without perceiving that they have but increased their thirst tenfold.

The king, being at the head of the file of carriages, could not from his place perceive those of the ladies and maids of honor, which were the last.

He was besides obliged to attend to the eternal interpellations of the young queen, who, more than happy in thus possessing her dear husband, as she, forgetful of royal etiquette, tenderly called him, gazed at him with fond affection, paid him the most delicate attention, as if anxious to bind him to her from the fear that any one should come to rob her of his society, or that he should of his own accord feel a wish to leave her.

Anne of Austria, at that moment freed from all care, excepting that proceeding from the shooting pains which every now and then assailed her—Anne of Austria appeared remarkably joyous; and although she divined the king's impatience she maliciously prolonged his torments by unexpected renewals of the conversation, at moments when the king, concentrating his thoughts, was beginning to indulge

in recollections of his late amorous adventure.

All this, the little attentions on the part of the queen, the teasing questions of Anne of Austria, at last appeared almost insupportable to the king, who knew not how to command the impulses of his heart.

He first of all complained of the heat; this was leading the way to other complaints, but he managed it so skilfully that Marie Therese did not perceive his object.

Therefore construing what the king had said literally, she fanned Louis with her ostrich feathers.

But the oppressive heat allayed, the king complained of cramps and twitches in the legs, and as the carriage just then stopped to change horses—

"Would you wish me to alight with you?" said the queen; "I am also suffering as you do. We will walk on a short distance; the carriages will soon overtake us, and we will get in again."

The king knit his brows; it is a severe trial that a jealous woman inflicts upon her faithless husband when, although a prey to jealousy, she has sufficient command over herself not to give him any overt pretext for anger.

Nevertheless, the king could not refuse: he therefore acquiesced, alighted from the carriage, gave the queen his arm, and walked on some steps with her while the horses were being changed.

While walking he cast an anxious glance upon the courtiers who were happy enough to perform the journey on horseback.

The queen soon perceived that walking did not please the king more than riding in the carriage. She therefore requested that they might return to it.

The king handed her in, but did not get in after her. He withdrew three steps and endeavored to discover in the file of carriages the one which so much interested him.

At the window of the sixth carriage appeared the fair face of la Vallière.

As the king stood gazing motionless and lost in admiration, not observing that all was ready and that they waited only for him, he heard a voice calling respectfully to him. It was M. de Malicorne, in the complete costume of an equerry, holding on his left arm the bridles of two horses.

"Did your majesty send for a horse?" said he.

"A horse! have you one of my horses?" asked the king, who was endeavoring to recollect the gentleman, whose face was not familiar to him.

"Sire," replied Malicorne, "I have at least a horse at your majesty's service."

And Malicorne pointed to the bay horse belonging to Monsieur, which Madame had remarked.

It was a superb horse, and royally caparisoned.

"But that is not one of my horses," observed the king.

"Sire, it is a horse from the stables of the Duke of Orleans. But his royal highness does not ride on horseback when the weather is so hot."

The king did not reply, but eagerly approached the horse, which was pawing the ground with its hoof.

Malicorne was about to hold the stirrup for him, but the king was already in the saddle.

Restored to good humor by this lucky chance the king rode smilingly up to the carriage in which the two queens were waiting for him; and notwithstanding the terrified looks of Marie Therese.

"Ah! yes," said he, "I have found this horse and I take advantage of it. I was absolutely suffocated in the carriage. Farewell for the present, ladies."

Then bending gracefully forward on the rounded neck of his steed he disappeared in a second.

Anne of Austria leaned out of the carriage to follow him with her eyes: he did not go far, for, when he reached the sixth carriage he pulled up suddenly, throwing his horse upon its haunches, and took off his hat.

He bowed to la Vallière, who on seeing him uttered a slight cry of surprise, blushing with pleasure at the same moment.

Montalais, who occupied the other corner of the carriage, returned the king a very profound reverence.

Then, as a woman of tact, she appeared to be observing the country they were passing through with great interest.

The conversation of the King and la Vallière began, like all conversations between lovers, by some eloquent glance and a few words devoid of meaning.

The king explained how much he had been oppressed by heat in his carriage, and this to such a degree, that on finding a horse it appeared to him a gift from heaven.

"And," added he, "the benefactor must be a very intelligent man, for he divined my wish. Now, there is one thing I much desire, and that is, to know the gentleman who has so opportunely and so adroitly served his king, and saved him from the cruel weariness which had assailed him.

While the king was saying this, Montalais, who from the first word had comprehended the whole matter—Montalais had drawn nearer to la Vallière, and had placed herself in such a manner as to catch the eye of the king, when he should conclude his sentence.

The result of this was, that, as the king looked almost as much at her as at la Vallière, while making this inquiry, she had a right to assume that it was addressed to her, and consequently might reply to it.

She therefore replied:

"Sire, the horse which your majesty rides is a horse belonging to Monsieur, which was led by one of the gentlemen of his royal highness."

"And what is the gentleman's name, if you please, mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur de Malicorne, sire."

The name produced its usual effect.

"Malicorne!" repeated the king, smiling.

"Yes, sire," replied Aure. See! it is the cavalier who is now galloping on my left."

And she pointed in fact to our friend Malicorne, who, with a most demure and sanctified air was riding beside Mademoiselle Aure—knowing full well that they were speaking of him at that moment, but seeming to pay no more attention to it than a deaf and dumb man would have done.

"Yes, that is the cavalier," said the king; "I remember his face and cannot well forget his name."

And the king looked tenderly at la Vallière.

Aure had nothing further to do. She had let fall the name of Malicorne; the soil on which it fell was good; and there was nothing now more to be done than to let the name take root, and the event bring forth its fruits.

Consequently she threw herself back into the corner, with the right of making to M. de Malicorne as many agreeable signs as she thought fit—because M. de Malicorne had had the good fortune to please the king.

As will be readily understood, Montalais did not allow such an opportunity to escape her; and Malicorne,

with his quick and penetrating eyes, caught these words:

"All goes well!"

And this accompanied by a pantomime simulating an exchange of kisses.

"Alas! mademoiselle," at length said the king, "the liberty of the country is about to cease. Your service with Madame will become more rigorous, and we shall no longer see each other."

"Your majesty loves Madame too much," said la Vallière, "not to come frequently to see her: and there your majesty in walking across the room—"

"Ah!" said the king in a tender tone of voice, and which he lowered by degrees, "to catch a glimpse is not to see each other; and yet it seems, that would suffice to you."

Louise did not reply; a sigh was swelling at her heart—but she stifled that sigh.

"You possess great power over your feelings," said the king.

La Vallière smiled with melancholy expression.

"Employ that power in loving," continued he, "and I shall bless God for having endowed you with it."

La Vallière remained silent, but raised her eyes, beaming with love, to the king's face.

Then, as if he had been electrified by that burning look, Louis put his hand to his forehead, and pressing his horse with his knees, made him bound forward a few paces.

La Vallière reclining with half-closed eyes, gazed at this handsome cavalier, whose plumes fluttered in the wind: she admired his gracefully rounded arms—his well-formed and nervous limbs, pressing his charger's sides—the fine outline of his profile, surrounded by long curls of lustrous hair, which every now and then discovered a well-shaped and rosy-colored ear.

In short, she loved, poor girl, and that love enraptured her.

After a few moments the king returned to her carriage door.

"Oh!" cried he, "you do not see then that your silence lacerates my heart. Oh! mademoiselle, you must be pitiless when you have resolved on breaking off with any one; and besides I believe you to be changeable. In short—in short, I fear the passion with which you have inspired me."

"Oh! sire, you mistake me," said la Vallière; when I do love it will be for my whole life."

"When you do love!" exclaimed the king sorrowfully. "What! then you do not love?"

She hid her face with her hands.

"See now! see now!" cried the king, "I had good reason to accuse you: are you not changeable, capricious, a coquette perhaps—oh! good Heaven! good Heaven!"

"Oh! no!" cried she; "re-assure yourself, sire. No! no! no!"

"Promise me then that to me you will always be the same!"

"Oh! always, sire."

"That you will not be guilty of those cruelties which break the heart; none of those sudden changes which would kill me."

"No! oh no!"

"Well, hear me. I like promises; I like to place under the guarantee of an oath, that is to say in God's holy keeping, all that interests my heart and love. Promise me, or rather swear to me, that if during this life we have but just commenced, a life altogether of sacrifice, of mystery, of pain, a life of contradiction, and of misunderstanding, swear to me that if we should be mistaken, if we should have misunderstood each other, if we have done each other wrong, and that is a crime in love, swear to me, Louise—"

This word thrilled through her to the very soul. It was the first time her name had been so uttered by her royal lover.

As to Louis, taking off his glove, he extended his hand to take this oath into the carriage.

"Swear to me that in all our quarrels, when we shall be separated for the time, that we will not allow a night to pass over after such a misunderstanding without either a visit, or at all events a message from one of us bearing to the other consolation and repose."

La Vallière clasped between her cold hands the burning hand of her lover, and gently pressed it, until a movement made by the king's horse, terrified by his near contact with the whirling wheels, compelled him to forego this happiness.

She had sworn.

"Return sire," said she, "return to the queens, I feel a storm rising in that quarter, a storm which threatens my heart."

Louis obeyed, bowed to Mademoiselle de Montalais, and galloped off to join the two queens.

Passing by Monsieur's carriage he saw that he was fast asleep.

Madame was not asleep.

She said to the king as he was passing by—

"What a fine horse you have there, sire—is it not Monsieur's favorite bay?"

As to the queen, she said but these words:

"Are you better, my dear sire?"

CHAPTER LXXXV:

WHEN the king arrived at Paris, he immediately summoned a council, and worked during part of the day.

The young queen remained in her own apartments with the queen-mother, and burst into tears after having taken leave of the king.

"Ah! dear mother," said she, "the king no longer loves me. What will become of me, great God!"

"A husband always loves such a wife as you are," replied Anne of Austria.

"The moment may arrive when he will love another woman."

"What do you call loving?"

"Oh! to be always thinking of some one—to be always seeking out that person."

"Have you remarked," said Anne of Austria, "that the king acts in this manner?"

"No, madam," replied the young queen, hesitating.

"Well, then, you see, Marie—"

"And yet, dear mother, you see that the king leaves me often—"

"The king, my daughter, belongs to his whole kingdom."

"And that is the reason he no longer belongs to me. And that is why I shall see myself, as so many queens have been, abandoned, forgotten, while love, glory and honors will be the portion of others. Oh! dear mother, the king is so handsome, how many are there who will tell him that they love him, how many must love him!"

"It rarely happens that women love a man in the king; but even should that happen, and I doubt it, you should wish rather, Marie, that these women should really love your husband. In the first place, the devoted love of a mistress is an element of rapid dissolution for the affection of the lover; and besides, by dint of loving, the mistress loses all empire over the lover when

she desires not his power, his riches, but his love. You should therefore wish that the king should love but faintly and that his mistress should love much."

"Oh! dear mother, but what intense power has an intense passion!"

"And you say that you are abandoned?"

"You are right—you are right! I am raving! There is however one torment, dear mother, that I could not undergo."

"And what is that?"

"That of the king's making a judicious choice, that of his forming another home for himself close to ours, that of his having a family with another woman. Oh! should I ever see children of the king—it would kill me!"

"Marie! Marie!" replied the queen mother with a smile, and she took the hand of the young queen, "remember well what I am now about to say to you, and may it always prove a consolation to you: the king cannot have a Dauphin without you, while you could have one without him."

After saying these words which she accompanied with an expressive laugh, the queen-mother quitted her daughter-in-law to step forward to receive Madame, whose coming a page had just announced in the grand study.

Madame had scarcely taken time to change her dress; she came in with agitated features, which revealed the formation of a plan the execution of which occupies the mind and the result alarms.

"I came to inquire," said she, "whether your majesties have been at all fatigued by our little journey."

"Not in the least," said the queen mother.

"A little," replied Marie Therese.

"As to myself, ladies, I have, above all, suffered from vexation."

"What vexation?" inquired Anne of Austria.

"The fatigue which the king must have endured from riding so long on horseback."

"Oh! is that all? Why, it is beneficial to the king."

"And I myself advised him to do so," said Marie Therese, turning pale.

Madame did not reply in any way to this; but one of those smiles peculiar to herself rose to her lips without communicating its expression to the rest of her features; then immediately

giving another turn to the conversation—

"We find Paris precisely as we left it. Always some new intrigue, some new plots, some new coquetry."

"Intrigues! what intrigues?" inquired the queen-mother.

"They are talking much about M. Fouquet, and Madame Plessis Bellière."

"Who thus inscribes herself number ten thousand," replied the queen-mother.

"But the plots, if you please?"

"We have, as it appears, some disagreement with Holland."

"And in what way?"

"Monsieur was telling me that story of the medals."

"Ah!" cried the young queen, "those medals struck in Holland, in which a cloud is represented as passing over the king's sun. You are wrong in calling that a plot—it is too vulgar to be so termed."

"And so contemptible that the king can have no other feeling than disdain," added the queen-mother; "but what said you as to coquetry, has it any reference to Madame d'Olonne?"

"Not at all, not at all; you must seek nearer home."

"*Casa de usted*," murmured the queen-mother, without moving her lips, and close to the young queen's ears.

Madame did not hear a word of it, but continued,

"You have heard the dreadful news?"

"Oh! yes; the wound of M. de Guiche."

"And you attribute it, as all the world does, to an accident when hunting."

"Why yes," cried the two queens, both seeming much interested.

Madame drew nearer.

"A duel," whispered she.

"Ah!" cried Anne of Austria, with an austere expression of countenance, for the word *duel* sounded harshly in her ears, it having been proscribed in France from the commencement of her regency.

"A deplorable duel which failed to cost Monsieur two of his best friends, the king two of his best servants."

"And what was the occasion of this duel?" inquired the young queen, inspired by some secret instinct.

"Coquetry," triumphantly replied Madame, "these gentlemen were desecrating on the virtues of a lady. One

of them thought that Pallas was unchaste compared with her. The other pretended that she rather played the part of Venus exciting Mars, and the result was, that these gentlemen fought as Hector and Achilles did."

"Venus exciting Mars," murmured the young queen to herself, without daring to seek further into the allegory.

"Who is this lady?" plainly asked Anne of Austria, "you said, I believe, a lady of honor."

"Did I say so?" cried Madame.

"Yes, I even thought I heard you name her."

"Do you know that a woman of this description is fatal to a royal house?"

"It is Mademoiselle de la Vallière," said the queen-mother.

"Yes, indeed, it is that little ugly thing."

"I thought she had been affianced to a gentleman, who is not either M. de Guiche or M. de Wardes, I suppose."

"That is impossible, madam."

The young queen took her tapestry work, which she unrolled with an affectation of tranquillity, belied by the trembling of her fingers.

"What were you saying as to Venus and Mars?" pursued the queen-mother, "is there then a *Mars*?"

"So she boasts."

"You have just said that she boasts of it?"

"That was the cause of the combat."

"And M. de Guiche sustained the cause of Mars?"

"Yes, certes, as a good servant."

"As a good servant!" exclaimed the young queen, forgetting all her reserve, and letting her jealousy escape her, "a good servant, and to whom?"

"Mars," replied Madame, "who could not be defended but at the expense of this Venus. M. de Guiche maintained the absolute innocence of Mars, and no doubt affirmed that Venus had boasted."

"And M. de Wardes?" tranquilly said Anne of Austria, "he, I suppose, propagated the rumor that Venus was in the right?"

"Ah! de Wardes," thought Madame, "you shall dearly pay the wound you have inflicted on the noblest of men."

And thereupon she began to attack Wardes with the greatest possible animosity, thus making him pay the debt he owed to the wounded count, and to herself, and with the certainty of

eventually causing the ruin of her enemy.

She said so much that Manicamp, had he been there, would have regretted having so well served his friend; because the certain ruin of his unhappy enemy would be the result.

"In all this," said Anne of Austria, "I see but one pest, and that is la Vallière."

The young queen resumed her work with absolute composure.

Madame still listened.

"And are you not of that opinion?" said Anne of Austria to her. "Do you not attribute to her the origin of this quarrel, and this combat?"

Madame replied by a gesture which was neither affirmative nor negative.

"I cannot then comprehend very clearly that which you said to me with regard to the dangers attending coquetry," rejoined Anne of Austria.

"It is true," hastily replied Madame, "that if the young person had not been a coquette, Mars would not at all have noticed her."

The word Mars again brought a fugitive blush to the cheeks of the young queen, but she nevertheless continued the work she had begun.

"I will not allow that at my court, men should thus be armed one against the other," phlegmatically observed Anne of Austria. "These manners were perhaps useful in times when the nobility being divided had no other rallying point than gallantry. Then women, who were the reigning power, had the privilege of encouraging and maintaining the valor of the nobles by frequent trials. But in our day, God be praised! there is but one master in all France."

"To this master is due the concurring energy of every faculty, of every thought. I will not suffer that one of my son's servants should be thus torn from him."

She turned to the young queen.

"What is to be done with this la Vallière?" said she, to her.

"La Vallière?" said the young queen, appearing to be surprised, "I do not know that name."

And this reply was accompanied by one of those freezing smiles which only become a royal mouth.

Madame was herself a great princess, great in mind, great from birth, and in her pride. She was compelled to pause a moment before she could recover her self possession

"She is one of my maids of honor," replied she, with a courtesy."

"Then," replied Marie Therese, in the same tone, "it is your concern, my sister, and not mine."

"Your pardon," rejoined Anne of Austria, "it is a concern of mine, and I understand full well," she continued, addressing a significant look to Madame, "I understand why Madame has communicated this to me."

"Whatever emanates from you, madam," said the English princess, "is pronounced by the lips of wisdom."

"On sending this young girl back to the country," said Marie Therese, with gentleness, "a pension should be granted to her."

"From my purse?" eagerly exclaimed Madame.

"No, no, madam," said Anne of Austria, interrupting her, "no rashness if you please. The king likes not that ladies should be spoken lightly of. Let all this, if you please, be settled among us. Madam, you will be so obliging as to have this young person ordered to attend us. You, my daughter, you will be good enough to withdraw for a moment to your own room."

The requests of the old queen were orders. Marie Therese rose to retire to her apartment, and Madame left the room to send a page to summon la Vallière.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

A FIRST QUARREL.

LA VALLIERE entered the apartment of the queen-mother without having the slightest suspicion that a dangerous plot had been combined against her.

She had imagined that she had been sent for for some purpose relating to her service, and the queen-mother had never behaved unkindly towards her under such circumstances. Moreover, as she was not altogether considered as dependent on the authority of Anne of Austria, all her intercourse with her, and her attentions towards her, were altogether voluntary, which her own complaisance, and the rank of the august princess induced her to tender with the best possible grace.

She therefore advanced towards the queen-mother with that sweet placid smile which formed her greatest attraction.

As she did not advance near enough, Anne of Austria made a sign to her to come close to her chair.

Madame at that moment returned, and with a perfectly tranquil air seated herself close to her mother-in-law, continuing the needle-work commenced by Marie Therese.

La Vallière, instead of the order which she expected immediately to receive, perceived all these preliminaries, and curiously, if not anxiously examined the countenances of the two princesses.

Anne was reflecting.

Madame retained an affectation of indifference which would have alarmed the least timid.

"Mademoiselle," suddenly cried the queen-mother, without thinking of disguising her Spanish accent, which she never failed to do excepting when angry, "come, let us talk a little about you, since all the world are talking of you."

"Of me?" exclaimed la Vallière, turning pale.

"Oh! yes, feign to be ignorant of it; have you not heard of the duel between M. de Guiche and M. de Wardes?"

"Oh! madam, a rumor of it reached me yesterday," replied la Vallière, clasping her hands.

"And you had no presentiment of that rumor?"

"And why should I have had any presentiment, madam?"

"Because two men never fight but from some motive, and because you must have known the motive of the animosity of these two adversaries."

"I was entirely ignorant of it, madam."

"Persevering denial is too commonplace a system of defence, and you who are a wit and a genius should avoid common-places. Find something else."

"Good heaven! your majesty terrifies me with that freezing air. Can I have had the misfortune to incur your displeasure?"

Madame laughed. La Vallière looked at her with an air of stupefaction.

The queen-mother resumed:

"My displeasure! you surely think not of what you are saying. I must think of persons in order to feel displeasure towards them. I think of you only because you are somewhat too much spoken of, and I do not like that the young ladies of my court should be spoken of."

"Your majesty does me the honor

to tell me so," replied la Vallière with alarm; "but I do not comprehend what reason any one can have to occupy themselves with me."

"Well, then, I will tell you. M. de Guiche will have had to defend you."

"Me!"

"Yes, you, yourself. He acted as a good knight, and beautiful, adventurous damsels like that knight's should raise a lance for them. As to myself I detest all lists and tournaments; I above all abominate adventures, and—take care to profit by this."

La Vallière sunk down at the queen's feet, who turned her back to her; she held out her hands to Madame, who laughed in her face.

A feeling of pride induced her to rise from her suppliant position.

"Ladies," said she, "I have demanded what is my crime. Your majesty ought to tell me this, and I remark that your majesty condemns me before having permitted me to justify myself."

"Ah!" cried the queen, "only hearken to these fine phrases, madam—these high-flown sentiments; this girl is an infanta, a follower of the great Cyrus style. She is a well of tenderness and of heroic poetry. It is easy to perceive, most lovely damsel, that we tutor our mind to accustom itself to an intercourse with crowned heads."

La Vallière felt struck to the heart; she did not become merely pale but white as a lily, and all her strength abandoned her.

"I intended to tell you," continued the queen disdainfully, "that if you continue to cherish such feelings, that you will humiliate us women to such a degree that we shall be ashamed of figuring near you. Become more simple-minded, mademoiselle. By-the-by, have I not heard that you are betrothed to some one?—it seems to me I did."

La Vallière restrained the beatings of her heart, which a new suffering was lacerating.

"Answer, then, when you are spoken to."

"Yes, madam."

"To a nobleman?"

"Yes, madam."

"And whose name is—"

"The Viscount de Bragelonne."

"Do you know that this is a most happy chance for you, mademoiselle? and that without fortune, without station in the world, without any very

considerable personal advantages. you ought to thank heaven for having allotted you such a destiny. And where is this Viscount de Bragelonne?" pursued the queen.

"In England," said Madame, "where the rumors of mademoiselle's success will not fail to reach him."

"Oh! heaven!" murmured la Vallière, much agitated.

"Well, then, mademoiselle," said Anne of Austria, "this youth shall be sent for, and you shall be sent off somewhere with him. If you are of a different opinion, and girls have often strange notions, trust to me, I will bring you back to the right path—I have done so for girls of less merit than yourself."

La Vallière heard nothing more. The pitiless queen added—

"I will send you alone to a place where you will be able to reflect maturely. Reflection calms the ardor of the blood—it devours all the allusions of youth. I suppose you have understood me?"

"Madam! madam!"

"Not a word."

"Madam, I am innocent of all that your majesty may suppose. Madam, witness my despair, I love, I so much respect your majesty."

"It would be better that you did not respect me," said the queen, with bitter irony. "It would be better that you were not innocent. Do you imagine, perchance, that I should content myself with allowing your departure had you committed the fault?"

"Oh! madam, you are killing me."

"Let us have no play acting here, if you please, or I shall take charge of the winding up. Go, retire to your own room, and profit by my lesson."

"Madam," said la Vallière to the Duchess of Orleans, seizing her hand, "intercede for me, you who are so good."

"Who, I?" cried the latter, with exulting joy; "you call me good—ah! mademoiselle, you do not believe a word that you are saying."

And she abruptly pushed back the hand of the young girl.

The latter, instead of shrinking, as the two princesses might have expected from her paleness and her tears, suddenly resumed her calmness and her dignity, made a profoundly ceremonious courtesy and retired.

"Well!" said Anne of Austria to

Madame, "do you think that she will again venture?"

"I always mistrust mild and patient dispositions," replied Madame; "there is nothing more courageous than a patient heart, nothing more firm than a mild temper."

"I will answer for it that she will think more than once before she again ventures to cast her glances on Mars the god of war."

"Unless she should avail herself of his shield," retorted Madame.

A proud look from the queen-mother replied to this reflection, which was not deficient in acuteness.

And the two ladies, tolerably well assured of their victory, went to rejoin Marie Therese, who was awaiting them with great impatience, which, however, she endeavored to conceal.

It was then six o'clock in the evening, and the king had just taken his afternoon collation. He lost no time; the repast over, and affairs of State concluded, he took Saint Aignan by the arm, and ordered the count to conduct him to la Vallière's apartment.

The courtier exclaimed loudly.

"Well! what is the matter?" cried the king. "It is a habit we must adopt; and in order to adopt a habit, we must commence by some fact."

"But, sire, the apartment of the maids of honor here is a perfect lantern; every body can see those who go into or out of it. It appears to me that some pretext—the following one for instance:

"Let us hear."

"If your majesty would wait till Madame is in her own rooms."

"No more waiting, no pretexts: we have had enough of all these vexations, these mysteries. I cannot see how a King of France can be dishonored by conversing with a lady of superior intellect. 'Evil be to him who evil thinks.'"

"Sire, sire, your majesty will pardon my excessive zeal—and the queen?"

"That is true! that is true! I wish the throne to be always respected. Well then, only this once I will go to see Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and after this I will use any pretext you please. To-morrow we will endeavor to invent some: to-night I have not the time."

Saint Aignan made no reply. He went down the staircase before the king, and crossed the court-yard with

a degree of shame which could not be effaced even by the honor of serving as a support to the king.

The fact was that Saint Aignan wished to maintain his character in the opinion of the two queens; though he by no means wished to do any thing that could displease *Mademoiselle de la Vallière*: and in order to succeed in all these desirable objects, it was difficult not to stumble against some difficulty.

Now, the windows of the young queen, those of the queen-mother, and those of *Madame* herself, all opened upon the court-yard which led to the apartments of the maids of honor. To be seen conducting the king there was at once to incur the displeasure of three great princesses; of three women whose influence was immovable—to secure perhaps the transient favor of an ephemeral mistress.

The unhappy Saint Aignan, who had evinced so much courage in protecting *la Vallière* under the shady bower or in the park of *Fontainebleau*, did not feel himself so brave when exposed to the open light. He thought he discovered a thousand defects in the young girl, and burned with desire to communicate them to the king.

But his torment was soon over; the court-yards were crossed. Not a curtain was raised, not a window opened. The king walked rapidly in, the first place on account of his impatience, and then on account of Saint Aignan's legs, who preceded him.

When they reached the door Saint Aignan wished to slip away, but the king retained him.

This was a delicacy which the courtier would fain have dispensed with.

He was obliged to follow Louis to *la Vallière's* room.

On the arrival of the monarch, the young girl was just drying up her tears; she did it so precipitately that the king perceived it.

He questioned her as an interested lover; he pressed her to tell him why she had wept.

"It is nothing, sire."

"But, still, you were weeping."

"Oh! no, sire."

"Look, Saint Aignan, can I be mistaken?"

Saint Aignan was obliged to reply, but he was in such embarrassment.

"In short, *mademoiselle*, your eyes are red," said the king.

"From the dust of the roads, sire."

"Why, no; you have not that air

of satisfaction which renders you so lovely and so attractive. You do not even look at me."

"Sire!"

"What did I say! you even avoid my looks."

She had, in fact, turned away.

"But in the name of Heaven, what is the matter?" cried Louis, whose blood was boiling.

"Nothing, I say again, nothing, and I am anxious to prove to your majesty that my mind is as unembarrassed as you can desire."

"Your mind unembarrassed, when I confuse you in every thing, even in your gestures? Has any one wounded, vexed you?"

"No, no, sire."

"Oh! if that be the case tell me so," cried the young king, with flashing eyes.

"But no one, no one, sire, has offended me."

"Well then, let us see. Resume that thoughtful gaiety, that joyous melancholy, which so much delighted me this morning. Come now, I pray you—"

"Yes, sire, yes."

The king stamped his foot.

"Why this is perfectly inexplicable," said he—so complete a change."

And he looked at Saint Aignan, who had perceived this gloomy languor in *la Vallière*, as also the increasing impatience of the king.

It was in vain the king begged and prayed; it was in vain that he used every art to combat this sad mood; the young girl's spirit was completely prostrated; the aspect even of death would not have awakened her from this torpor.

The king saw in this negative facility some unpropitious mystery; he began looking around him with an air of suspicion.

There happened unfortunately to be hanging in the room a miniature portrait of *Athos*.

The king saw this portrait, which bore a strong resemblance to *Bragelonne*, for it had been painted during the count's youth.

He gazed at it with threatening looks.

La Vallière, in the oppressed state of her feelings, was far from thinking of this picture, and could not divine the reason of the king's pre-occupation.

But the king had plunged into a sea of painful thoughts which more than

once had occupied his mind, and which he had until then always managed to repel.

He remembered the intimacy of the two young people from their earliest childhood.

He remembered the betrothal which had consequently ensued.

He remembered that Athos had waited upon him to ask the hand of la Vallière for Raoul.

He imagined that on her return to Paris, la Vallière had received certain letters from London, and that these letters had counterbalanced the influence which he had obtained over her heart.

Almost instantly he felt his brain stung by the savage monster known by the name of jealousy.

He questioned her again with renewed bitterness.

La Vallière could not reply. She would have been compelled to tell him all, to accuse the queen, to accuse Madame.

She would have had to sustain an open war with two great and powerful princesses.

It seemed to her that doing nothing to conceal what was passing within her from the king, the latter ought to read her heart, although she remained silent.

That if he truly loved, he ought to comprehend all, to divine all.

What then is sympathy, if it be not the divine flame which ought to enlighten the heart, and dispense true lovers from the necessity of using words.

She therefore remained silent, only weeping, sighing, and hiding her face with her hands.

Her sighs, her tears, which had at first affected, then alarmed Louis XIV., now irritated him.

He could not endure opposition, not even the opposition of sighs, and tears more than any other species of opposition.

All his words became sharp, pressing, aggressive.

This was a new grief added to the griefs the young girl was already enduring.

She drew from that which she considered the injustice of her lover, strength sufficient to resist not only the injustice of others, but his injustice also.

The king began to make direct accusations.

La Vallière did not even attempt to defend herself. She endured all these accusations without replying otherwise

than by shaking her head, without pronouncing any words but these two words which always escape hearts under profound affliction.

"My God! my God!"

But instead of allaying the irritation of the king this cry of grief augmented it. It was appealing to a power superior to his own, to a being who could protect la Vallière even against himself.

Moreover, he saw that he was seconded by Saint Aignan. The latter, as we have before said, felt the storm increasing; he did not know the degree which the king's love had attained. He felt hanging over him the displeasure of the three princesses, the ruin of poor la Vallière, and he was not sufficiently a knight errant not to fear being overwhelmed by this same ruin.

Saint Aignan therefore replied to the king's interpellations but by words uttered in a half whisper, or by starts and gestures, the object of which was to add fresh bitterness to the king's feelings, and bring about a decided quarrel, the result of which would free him from the disagreeable necessity of crossing the court-yards, in open daylight, and to follow his illustrious companion in his visits to la Vallière.

During this time the king became more and more angry.

He made three steps toward the door and returned.

The young girl had not raised her head although the sound of his footsteps ought to have informed her that her lover was about to leave her.

He paused a moment before her with his arms crossed over his chest.

"For the last time, mademoiselle, will you speak? will you assign some cause for this change, this versatility, this caprice?"

"What would you have me say, good heaven!" murmured la Vallière, "you must see, sire, that at this moment I am overwhelmed, crushed. You see that I have neither power of will, nor speech, nor thought."

"Is it then so difficult to speak the truth? In fewer words than you have just now uttered you might have told it."

"But the truth with regard to what?"

"To all."

The truth did in fact arise from the heart to the lips of la Vallière; her arms made a movement to open themselves, but her lips remained mute. The poor child had not yet been suffi-

ciently unhappy to venture on such a revelation.

"I know nothing," stammered she.

"Oh! this is more than coquetry," exclaimed the king, "it is more than caprice, it is treachery."

And this time, without further pausing, without allowing the strugglings of his heart to have any influence upon him, he rushed out of the room with a gesture of despair.

Saint Aignan followed him wishing for nothing better than to get away.

Louis XIV. only stopped when he reached the staircase, and supporting himself by the ballusters.

"See you," said he, "I have been most unworthily duped."

"How can that be, sire?" inquired the favorite.

"Guiche fought only for the Viscount de Bragelonne, and that Bragelonne—"

"Well?"

"She loves him still, and, in truth, Saint Aignan, I should die of shame should an atom of this love remain in my heart."

And Louis XIV. continued on his way to his own apartments.

"Ah! I had told your majesty this," said Saint Aignan, continuing to follow the king, and timidly peeping round at all the windows.

Unfortunately, the sortie was not so secretly executed as the entrance.

A curtain was raised, and behind that curtain was Madame.

Madame had seen the king come out of the apartments allotted to the maids of honor.

She rose as soon as the king had gone by, hurriedly left her own room, and ascended the steps two by two which led to the room from which the king had just issued.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

LESPAIR

AFTER the departure of the king, la Vallière had risen up with outstretched arms as if to stop him, than when the doors closed upon him, the sound of his footsteps was lost in the distance, she had only strength enough left to throw herself at the foot of her crucifix.

She remained there crushed, overwhelmed with grief, without being able to appreciate any thing but that grief itself, a grief which, moreover, she

could only comprehend by the instinct of sensation.

Amid this tumult of her thoughts, la Vallière heard her door open. She trembled. She turned round thinking it was the king who had returned.

She was mistaken; it was Madame.

Of what consequence was Madame to her? Her head again fell upon her prayer desk. It was Madame, agitated, irritated, threatening; but what mattered that?"

"Mademoiselle," said the princess, walking up to la Vallière, "it is very fine, I confess, to kneel down to pray, and act the saint; but submissive as you may be to the King of Heaven, it behooves you to submit a little to the will of the princes of the earth."

La Vallière with difficulty raised her head in token of respect.

"Only a short time ago," continued Madame, "you received an admonition as it appeared to me."

The eyes of la Vallière, at once fixed and wild, gave evidence of her ignorance and her forgetfulness.

"The queen recommended you to conduct yourself in such a manner that no one would be enoiced to spread unfavorable rumors with regard to you."

The gaze of la Vallière seemed interrogative.

"Well, then," rejoined the princess, "a person has just left your room whose presence is an accusation."

La Vallière remained mute.

"I will not that my house, the house of the first princes of the blood royal, should set a bad example to the court. You would be the cause of that example. I therefore declare to you, mademoiselle, and without the presence of any witness, for I wish not to humiliate you, I declare then that you are from this moment at liberty, and that you may return to your mother's house at Blois."

La Vallière could not fall lower; la Vallière could not suffer more than she had suffered.

Her countenance did not change, her hands remained joined upon her knees like those of the Magdalen.

"You have heard what I have said?" inquired Madame.

A shudder, which seemed to thrill through the whole of la Vallière's being, replied for her.

And as the victim gave no other sign of existence Madame left the room.

Then to the suspended pulsation of her heart, to the arrested and it may

he said, congealed state of the blood in all her veins, succeeded by degrees a more rapid state of pulsation in the wrists, the temples, and the neck. These pulsations progressively increasing soon changed this state of torpor into a vertiginous fever, in the delirium of which she saw all her friends combating against her enemies; she heard confusedly clashing together in her deafened ears words of frightful menace and of tender love; she no longer remembered who she was; she seemed raised above her first existence, as on the wings of a raging tempest, and on the horizon of the road along which the vertigo was hurrying her, she saw a tombstone rising before her, and opening to her the gloomy and formidable interior of eternal night.

But this painful and harrowing dream at length died away to give place to the habitual resignation of her character.

A ray of hope illuminated her heart, like a ray of light does the dungeon of a poor prisoner.

She transported her ideas to the road from Fontainebleau; she saw the king on horseback at her carriage door, telling her that he loved her and suing for her love; making her swear, and taking the oath himself, that not an evening should pass after a quarrel but that a visit, a letter, or a sign should be conveyed and give repose for the night after the anguish of the evening.

It was the king who had imagined this, who had himself sworn to observe the compact. It was therefore impossible that the king should fail to perform a promise which he had himself exacted, unless the king was a despot who commanded love as he commanded obedience; unless the king were so indifferent that at the first obstacle he at once changed his purpose.

The king, that gentle protector, who by a word, a single word, could cause these griefs to cease, the king had therefore combined with her persecutors.

Oh! his anger could not last; now that he was alone he must be suffering more than she even suffered. But he, he was not enchained as she was; he could act, move, come. She! she could not do aught else but wait.

And, poor child, she waited with all her soul, for it was impossible that the king should not come.

It was scarcely half-past ten o'clock.

He was either about to come, or to write to her, or to send some kind word to her by M. de Saint Aignan.

If he should come, oh! how she would spring forward to meet him! how she would cast aside all her misinterpreted delicacy; how would she tell him—

“It is not I who do not love you, it is they who will not that I love you.”

And then she thought she would tell him, after due reflection, and while thus reflecting she thought Louis less culpable. In fact, he was ignorant of all that had occurred. What must he have thought of her obstinacy in thus remaining silent? Impatient, irritable; as the king was known to be, it was extraordinary he should so long have retained his self-possession. Oh! doubtless she would not thus have acted, she would have understood it all, have divined all. But she was but a poor girl, and not a powerful queen.

Oh! if he did but come! if he did but come! how she would pardon him for all that he had made her suffer: how much more would she love him for having suffered.

And she awaited—her head stretched towards the door, her lips unclosed God pardon her the profane idea, but she thought of the kiss which the king's lips had distilled that morning while pronouncing the word love.

But should the king not come he would at least write; that was the second chance, a chance less sweet, less happy than the other, but which would still prove as much love, though love of a more timid nature. Oh! how would she devour that letter! how she would hasten to reply to it! how, the messenger once gone, would she kiss it, read it again and again, and press it to her heart, the thrice happy paper which was to bring her repose, tranquillity of mind and happiness.

And lastly, if the king should not come, if he should not write, it was impossible that he should not send Saint Aignan, or that Saint Aignan should not come of himself. To a third, how she would explain all! the royal majesty would not be there to freeze the words upon her lips, and then no doubt could remain in the king's heart.

All in la Vallière, heart and look, matter and mind, were concentrated on the opening of that door.

She said to herself that she had still

another hour of hope; that until midnight the king might either come, write, or send; that it would be only after midnight that all further expectation would be useless, all hope lost.

As long as there was any noise in the palace the poor girl imagined that she was the cause of that noise; she conceived, whenever she heard any one crossing the court-yards, that they must be messengers from the king coming to her apartment.

She heard the clock strike eleven; then it chimed a quarter past; then half past eleven.

In her anxious state of mind the minutes dragged slowly on; and yet to her they passed too rapidly.

It chimed the three quarters.

Midnight! midnight! The last sad moment of agonizing suspense struck in its turn.

With the last stroke of twelve, the last light was extinguished; with the last light the last ray of hope.

Thus, the king himself had deceived her; he was the first to break the oath which they had that day taken; twelve hours only had elapsed between the oath and his perjury. This certainly was not keeping up the delusion for any great length of time.

Therefore, not only did the king not love her, but he disdained her whom every one was at that moment overwhelming with cruelty; he disdained her so much as to abandon her to the disgrace of an expulsion from court, which was equivalent to an ignominious punishment. And yet it was the king who was the primary cause of this ignominy.

A bitter smile, the only symptom of anger which during this long struggle had flashed over the angelic countenance of the victim—a bitter smile rose to her lips.

And in truth, what was there left to her of this oath when she had lost the king?"

"Nothing!"

Her only hope was in her God.

She thought then of God.

"Oh! my God, thou dicteatest to me what I have now to do! It is from thee that I expect all; from thee that I ought to expect every thing!"

And she cast her eyes on her crucifix, of which she kissed the feet in holy adoration.

"Here is the Master!" she exclaimed "who never forgets nor abandons those who never forget nor abandon Him!"

It is to Him alone that we should sacrifice ourselves."

It would then have been visible to any one who could have cast an observing glance into this room—it would have been visible that the poor despairing one was taking a last resolve, forming a determinate plan in her mind, ascending in fine the last round of the ladder of Jacob, which leads the creatures of this earth to heaven.

Then, as her knees had no longer sufficient strength to bear her weight, she fell prostrate on the steps of her prayer desk, her head leaning against the foot of the cross, and her eyes fixed, panting for breath, she watched for the first rays of the dawning day.

Until two in the morning she remained in this wandering state of mind, or, rather, this religious ecstasy. She was no longer of this world.

And when she saw the violet-colored tints of morning ascending the roofs of the palace, and vaguely developing the form on the ivory crucifix, round which her arms were clasped, she arose with a certain degree of strength, kissed the feet of the divine martyr, descended the staircase leading from her room—and while doing this enshrouding her face in a black mantle—she reached the gate of the palace just as a patrol of mousquetaires were opening it to admit a company of Swiss soldiers coming to relieve guard.

Then gliding out behind the withdrawing guard, she got into the street before even the officer of the patrol could ask himself who this young woman could be who was escaping from the palace at so early an hour.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE FLIGHT.

LA VALLIERE left the palace behind the patrol of mousquetaires.

The patrol marched on to the right towards the rue Saint Honoré. La Vallière mechanically turned to the left.

Her resolution had been taken, her plan determined upon. She had decided on directing her steps to the Carmelite convent at Chaillot, the superior of which had a reputation for severity, which made the worldly ones of the court tremble with apprehension.

La Vallière had never resided in

Paris. She had never gone out on foot; she would not have found her way had she been in a calmer state of mind. This will explain why she ascended the rue Saint Honoré instead of going down it.

She wished to get away from the Palais Royal, and she hurried from it as fast as her feet could carry her.

She had heard it said that the Seine could be seen from Chaillot. She therefore directed her steps towards the Seine.

She went down the rue du Coy, and as she could not get through the Louvre, turned towards the church of Saint Germain-Auxerrois, went along the open space upon which Perrault afterwards built his colonnade.

She soon reached the quays.

She proceeded with rapid and agitated steps. She scarcely felt the weakness which from time to time made her slightly limp and which was the consequence of the severe sprain which she had suffered from in her youthful days.

At any other hour of the day her appearance would have excited the suspicions of the least clear-sighted persons, and have attracted the attention of the least curious of the passers by.

But at half-past two in the morning the streets of Paris are deserted or very nearly so, and there are to be found in them but a few industrious artisans, who leave their houses thus early to gain their daily bread, or some dangerous idlers who are returning to their residences after a night passed in agitation and debauchery.

To the first of these classes the day is beginning; to the second the day is ending.

La Vallière was terrified at the sight of all these faces, upon which her ignorance of the Parisian character did not allow her to distinguish the type of honesty in the one from the cynical depravity of the other. To her, misery was an object of terror, and all the people she then met appeared to her to be miserable beings.

Her dress, which was the one she had worn the day before, was elegant even in its negligence, for it was the same in which she had attired herself for the interview with the queen-mother; besides which, beneath her cloak, which was thrown back that she might see her way, her pallidness and her fine eyes spoke a language which was

unknown to these men of the lower classes, and, without knowing it, the poor fugitive excited the brutality of some of them and the compassion of others.

La Vallière therefore walked on in this hurried manner, and almost out of breath, till she reached the Place du Grève.

She was compelled to pause from time to time, press her hand against her heart, and lean against a house for support; after regaining her breath she would resume her course even more rapidly than before.

When she arrived at the Place du Grève, la Vallière found herself suddenly before a group of brawling fellows, who were staggering from side to side, more than half drunk. They had just left a boat moored to the quay.

This boat was unloading wine, and it could be readily discerned that they had been doing honor to its cargo.

They were celebrating their bacchanalian exploits by songs in three different keys, when on reaching the top of the balustrade which led to the quay they suddenly impeded the advance of the young girl.

La Vallière paused with affright.

They, on their side, on seeing a person thus attired in a court dress also paused, and then as if by common accord they joined hands and formed a circle around la Vallière, singing:

"You who thus alone are roaming,
Come, come, and sing and dance with us."

La Vallière at once understood that these words were addressed to her, and that these men wished to prevent her proceeding farther; she made several attempts to break through the circle, but they were altogether unavailing.

Her knees trembled beneath her, she felt that she was about to fall upon the pavement and uttered a loud shriek of terror.

But at the same moment, and even before her cry could be heard, the circle by which she was environed was broken through under the effort of a powerful pressure.

One of the men who had thus insulted her was knocked down to the left, another was sent head over heels down the steps and rolled to the water's edge, a third staggered against the parapet.

The young girl suddenly saw an officer of the mousquetaires standing before her; his brows were knit, his

lips uttered threats of vengeance and his arm was raised to follow up the threats he had pronounced.

The drunkards fled precipitately at the sight of the uniform, and, above all, after seeing the proofs of strength which he who wore it had just given.

"*Mordious!*" exclaimed the officer, "why it is Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

La Vallière, confounded at all that had been passing around her, stupified at hearing her own name thus pronounced, la Vallière raised her eyes to the officer's face and recognized d'Artagnan.

"Yes, sir," said she, "'tis I, 'tis I indeed."

And she was obliged to cling to his arm to support herself.

"You will protect me, will you not, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" she added, in a supplicating tone.

"Undoubtedly I will protect you—but where can you be going, good heaven! at such an hour as this?"

"I am going to Chaillot."

"You are going to Chaillot, and by la Rapée? why really, mademoiselle, you are turning your back to it."

"Then, my dear sir, be good enough to put me into the right road, and to accompany me a few steps."

"Oh! willingly."

"But how is it that I happen to meet you here? By what special favor of heaven have you thus come so opportunely to my assistance? I believe, in truth, that I am dreaming; it seems to me that I have lost my reason."

"I happen to be here, mademoiselle, because I have a house on the Place du Grève; its sign is the *Image de Notre Dame*—that I went there yesterday to receive my rent, and spent the night there. And that I rose thus early as I wished to be at the palace to see that my men were duly at their posts."

"Thanks," said la Vallière.

"I have told her what brought me here," said d'Artagnan to himself, "but what in the name of fortune brought her here, and why should she be going to Chaillot at such an unreasonable hour?"

And he offered his arm to her.

La Vallière took it, and then precipitately hurried on.

However, her precipitation was attended with great weakness; d'Artagnan perceived, this and proposed

to la Vallière to rest herself; she refused.

"But you are not aware of the distance from this to Chaillot?" observed d'Artagnan.

"No, I do not know the distance."

"It is very far."

"That matters not."

"You will have to walk at least a league."

"I will walk that league!"

D'Artagnan made no reply; he knew when a resolution was determined one by the mere tone of voice.

He rather carried than accompanied la Vallière.

At last they came in sight of the heights of Chaillot.

"To what house do you purpose going?" inquired d'Artagnan.

"To the Carmelite convent, sire."

"To the Carmelite convent?" repeated d'Artagnan, with astonishment.

"Yes, and as God has been pleased to send you to support me in the way, receive my thanks and my farewell."

"To the Carmelites! your farewell! why then you intend taking the veil?" cried d'Artagnan.

"Yes, sir."

"You!!!"

There was in the word *you*, which we have accompanied by three notes of admiration to render it as forcible as possible, there was in this word *you* a whole poem; it recalled to the mind of la Vallière the recollection of her former days at Blois, and recollections of all that had lately occurred at Fontainebleau. It said to her, "you who might have been happy with Raoul, you who might be powerful with Louis, you are about to take the veil—you!"

"Yes sir," she replied, "I—I am about to become the servant of the Lord; I renounce every thing in this world."

"But do you not deceive yourself as to your vocation? Do you not deceive yourself as to the will of God?"

"No, since God has permitted that I should meet with you. But for you I should assuredly have sunk from mere fatigue, and since God has placed you in my path to succor me, it is because He willed that I should reach my intended goal."

"Oh!" cried d'Artagnan, doubtfully, "this seems to me rather more than subtle."

"Whatever it may be," rejoined the agitated girl, "you are now fully in-

formed of the step I am about to take, and of my resolution. I have, after addressing to you my sincere thanks, a further favor to request of you."

"Speak on, mademoiselle."

"The king is ignorant of my flight from the Palace Royal."

D'Artagnan made a gesture of surprise.

"The king," continued la Vallière, "is ignorant of the step I am about to take."

"The king is ignorant of it," exclaimed D'Artagnan; "but have a care, mademoiselle, you do not calculate the import of your actions; no one should do any thing of which the king is ignorant, and above all persons attached to the court."

"I am no longer attached to the court, sir."

D'Artagnan gazed at the young girl with increasing astonishment.

"Oh! do not alarm yourself, sir," she rejoined, "all has been duly calculated, and even were it not so, it would be too late to retract my determination. The act is now irrevocably accomplished."

"Well, then, mademoiselle, let me hear what is it you desire of me."

"Sir, by that pity which every man owes to misfortune; by the generosity of your soul, by your honor as a gentleman, I adjure you to make an oath."

"An oath?"

"Yes."

"And of what purport?"

"Swear to me, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that you will not tell the king that you have seen me, and that I am with the Carmelites."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"I will not swear that," he replied.

"And why not?"

"Because I know the king, because I know you, because I know myself, because I know all the human kind:—no, I will not swear to that."

"Then!" exclaimed la Vallière with an energy of which she would not have been thought capable, "instead of the benedictions which I should have heaped upon you to the latest day of my existence, may you be accursed, for you will render me the most wretched of all human beings."

We have before said that d'Artagnan well knew those accents which proceeded from the heart; he could not resist this appeal.

He saw the agitation of her features; he saw the trembling of her limbs; he

saw the whole of this delicate and fragile form about to sink to the earth, staggered by this shock; he saw that further resistance would at once annihilate it.

"Well, be it as you wish, then," said he; "be not alarmed, mademoiselle, I will not say a word of it to the king."

"Oh! thanks, thanks," exclaimed la Vallière, "you are the most generous of men."

And in a transport of joy she seized both d'Artagnan's hands and pressed them between hers.

The latter was much moved.

"*Mordieu!*" he exclaimed, "here is one beginning where others leave off; this is too affecting."

Then la Vallière, who in the paroxysm of her grief, had fallen on to a stone bench, rose up and walked towards the convent of the Carmelites, which could be seen rising as it were with the increasing daylight.

D'Artagnan followed her at a distance.

The outer gate was half open; she glided through it like a pale spectre, and thanking d'Artagnan for the last time by waving her hand to him, disappeared.

As to d'Artagnan, when he found himself quite alone he reflected deeply on all that had occurred.

"This is, upon my faith," said he, "what may be truly called a false position. To keep a secret of such a nature as this, is keeping a red hot coal in one's pocket, and hoping that it will not burn the cloth. Not to keep the secret after having sworn that one would keep it, would be the act of a man devoid of honor. Generally good ideas strike me when I am running; but this time, or I am much mistaken, or I shall have to run very far before I can find a right solution to this unhappy affair.

"But which way shall I run?"

"Why, after all, the best road to take is always the one toward Paris; that is the only good road.

"Only we must run fast.

"But in order to run fast four legs are better than two. Unfortunately at this moment I have only my own two legs.

"A horse!" as I heard them say on the stage in London, 'A horse! my kingdom for a horse!'

"But now I think of it, it need not cost one so much as that.

"There is a guard of mousquetaires

stationed at the Barrière de la Conférence, and instead of the one horse I stand in need of I can there get ten."

This resolution being adopted, and with his accustomed rapidity of decision, d'Artagnan ran down the heights, reached the guard-house in question, took the fastest horse he could find there, and in little more than ten minutes reached the palace. The clock of the Palais Royal was just then striking five.

D'Artagnan inquired after the king.

He was informed that the king had gone to bed at his accustomed hour, having been occupied till that time with M. Colbert, and that, in all probability, he was still asleep.

"Come, come," said he, "she has told me the truth; the king is ignorant of all that has happened; for if he knew but half of it, the Palais Royal would at this moment be topsy-turvy."

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

HOW LOUIS HAD, ON HIS SIDE, SPENT THE TIME BETWEEN HALF PAST TEN AND MIDNIGHT.

THE king, on leaving the apartments of the maids of honor, had found Colbert in his cabinet, waiting to receive his orders for the ceremony of the following day.

The matter in question, and which we have before stated, was an audience to be given to the Dutch and Spanish ambassadors.

Louis XIV. had serious matters of complaint against Holland; the States had already several times been shifting and evasive in their relations with France; and without appearing to think of it, or in any way to alarm themselves about a rupture, they had once more neglected their alliance with his most Christian Majesty to combine all sorts of intrigues with Spain.

Louis XIV. on his accession—that is to say after the death of Mazarin—had found this question, which was altogether a political one, just commenced.

The solution of this question was of rather a difficult nature for a young man; but as in those days the whole nation was the king, the body was ready to execute whatever the head ordered.

A little anger, the action of young

and vivacious blood rushing towards the brain, was sufficient to change the line of former policy, and create an entirely new system.

The part played by diplomatists of those days was reduced to arranging among themselves the *coups d'Etat* of which their sovereigns might stand in need.

Louis was in a state of mind which was incapable of dictating to him a wise and considerate policy.

Still agitated by the quarrel which had just taken place with la Vallière, he paced up and down his cabinet, very desirous of finding an opportunity of venting the anger which was boiling within him, after having so long restrained himself.

Colbert on seeing the king come into the room, with a glance perceived the disposition of his mind, and at once comprehended the intentions of the monarch. He therefore beat to windward.

When the master demanded an account of what was to be said the following day, the sub-intendant began by observing that it was very singular his majesty had not been informed of the state of matters by M. Fouquet.

"Monsieur Fouquet," said he, "knows the whole of this affair with Holland. The correspondence goes to him direct."

The king, who was well accustomed to hearing Colbert pull M. Fouquet to pieces, allowed this outburst to pass by without making any reply to it. He, however, continued to listen.

Colbert saw the effect he had produced, and hastened to retrace his steps, by saying, that M. Fouquet was not so culpable as he might at the first blush appear to be seeing that at that moment his mind was much preoccupied.

The king raised his head.

"And what are these preoccupations?"

"Sire, men are but men; and M. Fouquet has his defects as well as his great qualities."

"Ah! he has defects? And who is there that is free from them, Monsieur Colbert?"

"Your majesty has also some trifling ones," replied Colbert boldly—who knew how to mete out a heavy dose of flattery with a slight one of blame—"the arrow, cleaves the air, notwithstanding its weight, thanks to the weak feathers which sustain it."

The king smiled.

"What, then, is M. Fouquet's defect?"

"It is always the old story, sire. It is said that he is in love."

"In love! and with whom?"

"I do not know exactly, sire. I know but little of gallantry, as it is called."

"But you must know it, since you speak of it."

"I have heard pronounced—"

"What?"

"A name."

"What name?"

"Why that I no longer remember."

"Well, speak on."

"I believe it is one of Madame's maids of honor."

The king started.

"You know more of this than you are willing to say, Monsieur Colbert."

"It is not so, I assure you."

"Why all Madame's maids of honor are well known, and by repeating to you their names you would perhaps remember the one you are seeking for."

"No, sire."

"Endeavor."

"It would be altogether useless, sire. When the name of a lady is called in question, and the mention of it may prove injurious to her, my memory becomes a chest of adamant of which I have lost the key."

A cloud passed over the king's mind, and his brow lowered; then wishing to appear altogether master of himself and shaking his head,

"Let us consider this affair with Holland," said he.

"But first of all, sire, at what hour will your majesty receive the ambassadors?"

"Early in the morning."

"At eleven o'clock?"

"That is too late—nine o'clock."

"That is very early."

"With friends it would not be of any importance whatsoever; with friends we can do whatever we please, but with enemies why there can be nothing better than their feeling hurt. I shall, I confess, be not at all sorry to come to a conclusion with these marsh birds, who tire me out with their continued cries."

"Sire, it shall be arranged as your majesty may deem fit. At nine o'clock then, and I will order every thing in consequence. Is it to be a solemn audience?"

"No, I wish to enter into an expla-

nation with them, but not to imbitter matters, which always happens when there are many persons present. But at the same time I wish to have things clearly understood, that I may not have to commence the whole affair again."

"Your majesty will please to designate the persons who are to be present at this reception."

"I will draw up the list. Now let us speak of these ambassadors. What is it that they ask?"

"Allied with Spain they gain nothing. Allied with France they lose much."

"And how so?"

"Allied with Spain, they are protected by the possessions of their ally upon which they cannot infringe, notwithstanding their great desire to do so. From Antwerp to Rotterdam is but a step by the Scheldt and the Meuse. If they wish to take a slice of the Spanish cake, you, sire, the son-in-law of the king of Spain, can in two days, with cavalry, transport yourself from your own territory to Brussels. The question thereupon is to pick a quarrel with you, at the same time giving you such cause of suspicion with regard to Spain as to make you unwilling to meddle with its affairs."

"It would be much more simple then," replied the king, "to enter into a firm alliance with me by which I should gain something, while they would gain all they can desire."

"By no means, for should it perchance happen that your territories and theirs should border each other, your majesty would not be a very convenient neighbor. Young, ardent, and warlike, the King of France might inflict furious blows on Holland, and above all should he become her next door neighbor."

"I can fully understand all this, Monsieur Colbert, and you have well explained it, but your conclusion if you please."

"Wisdom is never wanting in the decisions of your majesty."

"What will these ambassadors say to me?"

"They will tell your majesty that they strongly desire to enter into an alliance with you, and that will be a falsehood. They will tell the Spaniards that the three powers ought to unite against the prosperity of England, and that will be a falsehood, for the natural ally of your majesty at this moment is England, for she has ships of war, and

you have not, and it is by England that you can counterbalance the power of the Dutch in the East Indies, it is in England, a monarchical country, that your majesty has alliances of consanguinity."

"That is well; but what would you reply to them?"

"I would reply, sire, with unequalled moderation, that Holland is not altogether well disposed towards the king of France, that the symptoms of public opinion in Holland are alarming to your majesty, that certain medals have been struck, the devices upon which are insulting to your majesty."

"To me!" cried the king, angrily.

"Oh! no, sire, no; insulting is not the word; I have mistaken the term; I should have said extraordinarily flattering to the Batavians."

"Oh! if that is the case it matters not; the pride of these Batavians imports me little," said the king, sighing.

"Your majesty judges most rightly. However, in politics it can never do harm, and this your majesty knows better than I do, to be unjust, in order to obtain a concession. Your majesty by complaining feelingly against the Batavians, will appear to them more considerable."

"What are these medals, then?" inquired Louis, "for if I speak of them, I ought to know what I am to say of them."

"In faith, sire, I do not exactly know, some device that is outrageously arrogant. That is the sense of them—the words are of but little consequence."

"Very well, I will merely utter the word medal, and they will understand it as they please."

"Oh! they will understand it. Your majesty may also hint at some pamphlets that are in circulation."

"Never! Pamphlets defile those who write them much more than those against whom they are written. Monsieur Colbert, I thank you—you may now withdraw."

"Sire!"

"Adieu! Do not forget the hour, and be there."

"Sire, I am waiting for the list your majesty has to give me."

"That is true."

The king hesitated. He was not thinking of the list. The clock on the chimney-piece struck half-past eleven.

On the features of the prince could be discerned the fearful struggle which

pride and love were holding in his heart.

The political conversation which he had been engaged in with Colbert had much allayed the irritation of the king's feelings, and the pale and agitated features of la Vallière spoke to his imagination in much more forcible language than the Dutch medals or the Batavian pamphlets.

He remained ten minutes asking himself whether he ought or ought not to return to la Vallière's room, but Colbert having respectfully reiterated his request for the list, the king blushed for having thought of love when matters of serious import demanded his attention.

He then dictated:

The Queen-mother.

The Queen.

Madame.

Madame de Motteville.

Mademoiselle de Chatillon.

Madame de Navailles.

And as to men:

Monsieur.

Monsieur le Prince.

M. de Grammont.

M. de Manicamp.

M. de Saint Aignan.

And the officers on service.

"The ministers?" said Colbert.

"That is a matter of course, and the secretaries."

"Sire, I will go and prepare every thing; the orders shall be delivered in good time to-morrow."

"Say, rather, to-day," sadly responded Louis.

It had at that moment struck twelve.

It was at that moment that la Vallière was almost expiring from grief and agonizing disappointment.

The king's attendants then came in to undress his majesty: the queen had been expecting him for the last hour.

Louis went to her apartment sighing; but even while sighing he congratulated himself on his determination. He applauded himself for being firm in love as well as in politics.

CHAPTER XC

THE AMBASSADORS.

D'ARTAGNAN, with some slight exceptions, had been informed of all the circumstances related in the last chap-

ter, for he could reckon as his friends all the useful persons in the household; officious servants, proud of being noticed by the captain of the mousquetaires, for the captain was in himself a power; and besides, setting aside all ambitious views, they were proud of being considered as something by so brave a man as d'Artagnan.

D'Artagnan in this manner was informed every morning of all he had not been able to ascertain the previous evening, not being ubiquitous, so that with what he had been able personally to inform himself during the day and that which he learned from others he could form a fasces which he could at pleasure unfasten, and take from it the weapon which he considered necessary to his purpose.

By following this plan d'Artagnan's two eyes rendered him as much service as if he had possessed the hundred eyes of Argus.

Political secrets, bed chamber secrets, sayings, which had escaped the courtiers on passing through the ante-chambers—d'Artagnan knew all these and shut them closely up in the vast and impenetrable tomb of his memory, side by side with the royal secrets so dearly purchased and so faithfully retained.

He therefore knew of the king's interview with Colbert; he knew therefore of the audience to which the ambassadors were that morning to be admitted; he knew therefore that the medals would be spoken of; and while forming to himself an idea of the whole conversation from the few words which had been communicated to him, he returned to his post in the apartments in order to be there at the moment when the king should wake.

The king that morning woke very early, a fact that proved that he also had slept badly. About seven o'clock he gently opened his door.

D'Artagnan was at his post.

His majesty was pale and appeared much fatigued; moreover, he had not finished dressing.

"Let Monsieur de Saint Aignan be sent for," said he.

Saint Aignan doubtless expected to be summoned thus early, for when the messenger went to his room he was already dressed.

Saint Aignan hastened to obey, and went into the king's apartment.

A few minutes afterwards the king and Saint Aignan came out and passed along the gallery the king walking first,

D'Artagnan was at the window which opened on the court-yard; he had no occasion to put himself out of the way to follow the king with his eyes. It might have been imagined that he knew beforehand where the king was going.

The king went towards the apartments occupied by the maids of honor.

This did not at all astonish d'Artagnan. He felt convinced, although la Vallière had not said a word to him on the subject, that his majesty had some wrong to remedy.

Saint Aignan followed him as on the previous evening, but somewhat less apprehensive, somewhat less agitated than on that occasion, for he hoped that at seven o'clock in the morning the king and himself alone were stirring of all the august occupants of the palace.

D'Artagnan was still standing at the window, to all appearance uninterested and calm. It might have been sworn that he saw nothing, and that he did not at all know who were these two knight-errants in search of adventure, who were crossing the court-yards, muffled up in their cloaks.

And yet d'Artagnan, though not appearing in the slightest degree to be looking after them, did not lose sight of them for a moment, and while whistling the grand march of the mousquetaires, which he never remembered but on very great occasions, foresaw and calculated the tempest of cries and anger which would be raised on their return.

The king, in fact, went into la Vallière's room, and finding it empty, and the bed untouched, he began to be alarmed, and called for Montalais.

Montalais hastened to obey the call, and her astonishment was equal to that of the king.

All that she could tell his majesty was, that she thought she had heard la Vallière weeping during the early part of the night; but knowing that his majesty had been there she had not dared to make any inquiry into the cause.

"But," cried the king, "where do you imagine that she can be gone?"

"Sir," replied Montalais, "Louise is a very sentimental person; and I have often seen her rise at day-break and go down into the garden. Perhaps she has gone there this morning."

This appeared very possible to the king, who immediately went down

stairs to begin his search after the fugitive.

D'Artagnan saw him reappear, pale and talking anxiously to his companion.

They both went toward the garden—the king walking so rapidly that Saint Aignan followed him panting for breath.

D'Artagnan, who did not budge from his window—continued whistling, appearing to see nothing, but seeing every thing.

"Come, come," murmured he, when the king had disappeared, "his majesty's passion is a more violent one than I had imagined. He is doing now, it seems to me, more than he would have done for Mademoiselle de Mancini."

The king returned in about a quarter of an hour; he had searched for la Vallière in every quarter of the garden; he was out of breath.

It is not necessary to say that the king had found no trace of her.

Saint Aignan followed him, fanning himself with his hat, and asking, in an agitated voice, for information from every servant that he met—from every one whom he happened to fall in with.

Manicamp happened to cross his path. Manicamp had just arrived by easy stages from Fontainebleau; where others had taken only six hours to perform the journey, he had taken twenty-four.

"Have you seen Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said Saint Aignan to Manicamp.

To which Manicamp replied, in his usual dreaming and absent manner, imagining the count was inquiring after de Guiche's health—

"I thank you, the count is rather better."

And he continued on his way toward the ante-chamber, where he found d'Artagnan, from whom he asked an explanation of the terrified air which he imagined he had seen in the king.

D'Artagnan replied that he had been mistaken; that the king, on the contrary, was gay even to folly.

It struck eight o'clock while d'Artagnan was saying this to Manicamp.

The king usually took his breakfast precisely at that hour.

The Code of Etiquette had firmly established that the king should always be hungry at eight o'clock.

He had it brought to him in his own room on a small table, and ate it very hurriedly.

Saint Aignan, from whom the king would not separate, held the napkin for him.

Then he hastily got through some military audiences.

During these audiences he sent Saint Aignan to make some fresh inquiries.

And then, still occupied, still anxious, constantly watching for the return of Saint Aignan, who had sent all his servants in search of la Vallière, and who, himself, had made every effort to gain some tidings of her, the king heard the clock strike nine.

Before it had done striking he went into his great cabinet.

The ambassadors had entered it at the first stroke of nine.

Then came the two queens and Madame.

There were three ambassadors from Holland and two from Spain.

The king gave them a glance and bowed to them.

At that moment also Saint Aignan entered the room.

To the king his entrance was infinitely more important than that of the ambassadors, however numerous they might be or from whatever country.

And consequently the king, before attending to any other person present, made an interrogating sign to d'Artagnan, who replied to it by a very decided and negative shake of the head.

The king's self-possession was very nearly forsaking him; but as the queens, the great nobles and the ambassadors had their eyes fixed upon him, he made a vigorous effort to regain his composure, and invited the latter to state their demands to him.

One of the Spanish deputies then made a long oration, in which he extolled the advantages of an alliance with Spain.

The king interrupted him, saying to him:

"Sir, I hope that that which is considered good for France ought to be good for Spain."

These words—and above all the peremptory tone in which they were pronounced—made the ambassador turn pale and the two queens blush, who being both Spaniards, felt themselves wounded by this reply, both in their pride of birth and nationality.

One of the Dutch ambassadors, in his turn, began to speak.

He complained of the prejudices which the king evinced against the government of his country.

The king interrupted him also.

"Sir," said he, "it is strange that you should come here to complain, when it is I who have reason to complain, and yet you see I have not done so."

"Reason to complain, sire," said the Dutch ambassador, and of what offence?"

The king smiled bitterly.

"Would you blame me, sir," said he, "for forming prejudices against a government which authorizes and protects public insulters?"

"Sire!—"

"I tell you," rejoined the king, more irritated by his private vexations than by the political question he was then discussing, "I tell you that Holland is the land of refuge to all who hate me, and above all to those who insult me."

"Oh! sire!"

"Ah! you ask for proofs of this, do you not? Well, then, proofs can easily be furnished. Whence spring those pamphlets in which I am represented as a monarch without glory and without authority; your press groans with them. Were my secretaries here I would cite to you the titles of these pamphlets, and the names of their printers."

"Sire," replied the ambassador, "a pamphlet cannot be deemed the work of a nation. Is it equitable that so great a king as your majesty should render a great people responsible for the crime of some few furious demagogues dying with hunger?"

"Be it so; I will grant you that. But when the mint of Amsterdam strikes medals to disgrace me, is that also the crime of some few furious demagogues?"

"Medals," stammered the ambassador.

"Yes, medals," reiterated the king, looking at Colbert.

"Your majesty," the Dutchman ventured to say, "must be very sure."

The king still continued looking at Colbert; but Colbert appeared not to comprehend him, and remained silent, notwithstanding the expressive looks of the king.

Then d'Artagnan advanced, and taking from his pocket an apparently new coin placed it in the king's hand.

"That is the medal which your majesty is seeking," said he.

The king took it,

Then with that eye, which, since he

had really been master of his kingdom had made all quail beneath him, he then saw an insolent figure representing Holland, who, as Joshua did, was arresting the progress of the sun with this legend:

"In conspectu meo stetit sol."

"And at my presence the sun stopped!" exclaimed the king, with great fury. "Ah! you will not any longer deny this, I hope."

"And the sun," said d'Artagnan, "is that one?"

And he pointed to the panels of the room on every one of which this emblem shone forth multiplied and resplendent with the superb device—

"Nec pluribus impar."

The anger of Louis, fed by the agonies of his private griefs, had no need of this new spur to become overwhelming. In his eyes could be discerned the ardor of a violent quarrel ready to burst forth.

A look from Colbert allayed the threatening storm.

The ambassador ventured to offer some excuses.

He said that the vanity of a people was not a matter of serious importance, that Holland was proud of having, with the trifling resources she possessed, sustained her rank as a great nation, even against great kings, and should a little smoke have intoxicated his countrymen, he begged the king to excuse that intoxication.

The king appeared to be wishing for advice; he looked at Colbert who remained altogether impassible.

And then at d'Artagnan.

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders.

This movement was a flood gate, raised by which the royal anger could outpour itself, which had been so long restrained.

No one knowing against whom this but too visible anger would be directed, the whole assembly remained gloomily silent.

The second Dutch ambassador took advantage of this silence, and in his turn offered some apologies.

While he was speaking, and as the king, who had again fallen into a reverie on his own personal afflictions, was listening to the ambassador's agitated voice like an absent man listening to the murmurs of a cascade, d'Artagnan, on whose left hand Saint Aignan was standing, drew closer to him, and in a tone well adjusted to strike the ear of the king,

"Have you heard the news, count?" said he.

"What news?" inquired Saint Aignan.

"Why the news regarding Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

The king started, and involuntarily moved a step nearer to the two conversers.

"What then has happened to la Vallière?" cried Saint Aignan, with an eagerness that can readily be imagined.

"Why, poor child," replied d'Artagnan, "she is going to take the veil."

"Going to take the veil!" exclaimed Saint Aignan.

"Going to take the veil!" cried the king, in the midst of the ambassador's speech.

Then, being restrained by etiquette, he recovered his self-possession, but still continued listening to d'Artagnan and Saint Aignan.

"And in what convent?" demanded Saint Aignan.

"The Carmelites, at Chaillot."

"But from whom in the devil's name can you have learned this?"

"From herself."

"You have seen her?"

"Twas I myself who conducted her to the Carmelites."

The king did not lose a syllable of this conversation, he was boiling with rage, and his face colored deeply.

"But why this flight?" asked Saint Aignan.

"Because the poor girl was yesterday driven from the court," replied d'Artagnan.

He had no sooner spoken these words than the king made an authoritative gesture.

"Enough, sir," said he to the ambassador, "enough."

Then advancing towards the captain of the mousquetaires, he inquired,

"Who was it that said that la Vallière was about to take the veil?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," replied the favorite.

"And is what you have said true?" inquired the king, turning to d'Artagnan.

"It is true as truth itself."

The king clenched his hands, and turned pale.

"You added something to that information, M. de Artagnan," he rejoined.

"I do not remember, sire."

"You added that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had been driven from the court."

"Yes, sire."

"And is that also true?"

"Of that you can inform yourself, sire."

"And through whom?"

"Oh!" cried d'Artagnan, as a man who objects to replying.

The king bounded with impatience, thinking no more of ambassadors, ministers, courtiers and politicians.

The queen-mother rose from her chair; she heard nearly all that passed, and what she had not heard she had divined.

Madame, almost fainting from alarm and anger, endeavored to rise as the queen-mother had done, but she fell back into her arm-chair, which, by an instinctive movement, she caused to recede a yard or two.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "the audience has terminated; I shall communicate my answer, or rather my will, to Spain and Holland."

And with an imperious gesture he dismissed the ambassadors.

"Beware, my son," said the queen-mother, with indignation; "beware, for it would seem to me you are scarcely master of yourself."

"Ah! madam," roared the young lion with a terrific gesture, "if I be not master of myself, I will be so, I promise you, of those who outrage me. Come with me, Monsieur d'Artagnan, come."

And he left the audience chamber amid the stupefaction and the terror of all present.

The king hurried down the staircase and was about to cross the court-yard.

"Sire," said d'Artagnan, "your majesty is taking the wrong way."

"No, I am going to the stables."

"That is not necessary, sire, I have horses here in readiness for your majesty."

The king replied to his faithful servant but by a look, but this look promised more than the ambition of three d'Artagnans could have ever hoped for.

CHAPTER XCI.

CHAILLOT.

ALTHOUGH they had not been ordered to attend Manicamp, and Malicorne followed the king and d'Artagnan.

They were two very intelligent men, only Malicorne frequently arrived too.

soon from ambition; Manicamp frequently arrived too late from idleness. On this occasion they were both in the nick of time

Five horses were standing ready.

Two were immediately taken possession of by the king and d'Artagnan; two by Manicamp and Malicorne.

A page of the stables jumped upon the fifth.

The whole cavalcade went off at a gallop.

D'Artagnan had, in fact, selected the horses himself; they were really horses such as anxious lovers would have chosen—they did not merely gallop, they flew.

In ten minutes after their departure from the palace the cavalcade, in the shape of a whirlwind of dust, arrived at Chaillot.

The king jumped lightly to the ground, but although this manoeuvre was executed very rapidly he found d'Artagnan holding the bridle of his horse.

The king thanked the mousquetaire by a sign and threw the bridle over the arm of the page.

He then rushed into the vestibule of the convent, and pushing the door violently entered the parlor.

Manicamp, Malicorne and the page remained outside; d'Artagnan followed the king.

The first object that struck the king's eyes on entering the parlor was Louise; not on her knees, but lying prostrate at the foot of a large stone crucifix.

The young girl was stretched on the damp pavement, and was scarcely visible in that gloomy room, into which the light entered only through a narrow window, which was grated with iron bars and further obscured by creeping plants.

She was alone, inanimate, cold as the stones on which she was reclining.

On thus perceiving her the king thought her dead, and uttered a cry of terror, which made d'Artagnan rush toward him.

The king had already encircled la Vallière's lifeless form with one of his arms. D'Artagnan assisted the king in raising the poor girl, whom the numbing hand of death had apparently already seized.

The king then took her into his own arms, and warmed with his kisses her temples and ice-cold hands.

D'Artagnan ran to the bell and rang it violently

Immediately a number of the Carmelite sisters rushed into the room.

These holy virgins uttered a cry of horror on perceiving two men holding a woman in their arms.

The Superior soon hastened after the nuns.

But a more worldly woman than even most of the women at court, notwithstanding her great austerity, she at once recognized the king from the respect which was evinced towards him by all present, as also from the sovereign manner in which he ordered every one belonging to the community.

Therefore, immediately on ascertaining that it was the king, she withdrew to her own apartment, that she might not be constrained to compromise her own dignity.

But she sent some of the nuns with all sorts of cordials, Hungary water, melisse, &c., &c., giving orders besides that the gates of the convent should be closed.

It was high time they should be so, for the grief of the king had become loud and despairing. He appeared decided on sending for his own physician, when la Vallière recovered her consciousness.

On opening her eyes the first thing she saw was the king kneeling at her feet. Doubtless she did not recognize him, for she heaved a deep sigh.

Louis gazed at her with a most eager look.

At length her wandering eyes fixed themselves on the king.

She recognized him, and made a feeble effort to withdraw herself from his arms.

"What!" she exclaimed, "is the sacrifice not yet accomplished!"

"Oh! no, no, and it shall never be accomplished," cried the king; "'tis I who swear it to you."

She raised herself up, but weak and overwhelmed as she was by her sufferings, she said—

"It must be so, however; it must be so; do not attempt to restrain me."

"Think you that I will allow you thus to sacrifice yourself? Never! never!"

"Good!" murmured d'Artagnan to himself; "I think it is time for me to withdraw. Since they are beginning to talk to each other, it is well that all ears should be removed."

D'Artagnan left the room; the two lovers remained alone.

"Sire," continued la Vallière, "not

a word more, I entreat you; do not ruin the only prospect I now have, that is to say, my salvation, and your own, that is to say, your glory, for a caprice."

"A caprice!" exclaimed the king.

"Oh! now," cried la Vallière, "now I can clearly read your heart."

"You, Louise?"

"Oh! yes, I—"

"Explain yourself."

"An incomprehensible, unreasonable inclination may momentarily appear to you a sufficient excuse, but you have duties which are incompatible with your love for a young girl. Forget me."

"I forget you!"

"That is already done."

"Come death rather than that!"

"Sire, you cannot love her upon whom you have this night inflicted with torments worse than death, and so cruelly—"

"What can you mean?—come, now, explain."

"What was it that you asked of me only yesterday morning?—tell me. To love you. What did you promise me in exchange? Never to allow midnight to pass by without offering me a reconciliation should you at any time have had reason to be angry with me."

"Oh! forgive me, forgive me, my dear Louise! I was mad with jealousy."

"Jealousy is an evil plant, which shoots up again, like tares, even after they have been cut down. You will again be jealous, and then you will indeed destroy me. Have pity and allow me now to deny."

"Utter another such a word as that, mademoiselle, and you will see me expire at your feet."

"No, no, sire, I am too well aware of my own little value. Believe me, and you will not thus cast yourself away for a poor, wretched girl whom every one despises."

"Oh! name to me those whom you accuse, name them to me."

"I have no complaint to make against any one, sire; I accuse only myself. Farewell, sir, you are exposing yourself to improper remarks by speaking to me thus."

"Beware, Louise; by speaking to me in this way you reduce me to despair. Beware."

"Oh! sire, sire, leave me to God I entreat you."

"I would tear you ever from God himself."

"But before doing so," cried the poor young girl, "tear me from those ferocious enemies who wish to deprive me of life, of honor. If you have the will to love me have also the power of shielding me; but no, she whom you say you love is insulted, is contemned, is turned out of doors."

And the unoffending child on being compelled by her anguish to utter an accusation, wrung her hands and sobbed bitterly.

"You were turned out of doors?" cried the king, "this is the second time I have been told this."

"Ignominiously, sire. You see then, that I have no protector but God, no consolation but that of prayer, no other asylum but the cloister."

"You shall have my palace—you shall have my court. Oh! henceforth fear nothing, Louise. Those who yesterday drove you thus away shall to-morrow tremble in your presence. What say I, to-morrow? Even this morning I evinced my high displeasure—threatened. I can dart the thunder which I have still withheld. Louise! Louise! you shall be cruelly avenged. Tears of blood shall repay the tears you have shed. Only name to me your enemies."

"Never! never!"

"How then can I strike?"

"Sire, those whom you would strike would cause your hand to recoil."

"Oh! you know me not," cried Louis, exasperated. "Rather than recoil I would burn my whole kingdom, and would curse my family. Yes, I would strike, even strike this arm were this arm so cowardly as not to annihilate all who have become the enemies of the most gentle, the loveliest of created beings."

And saying these words, Louis struck violently, with his clenched hand, the oaken wainscoting which returned a gloomy murmur.

La Vallière became terrified. The anger of this all powerful young man had something imposing and ominous in it, for like the tempest it might prove mortal in its consequences.

She, whose grief appeared to her as unparalleled, was overcome by this grief which thus burst forth in threats and violence.

"Sire," said she, "for the last time I supplicate you to leave this place; the calmness of this retreat has already strengthened me; I feel myself more tranquil here beneath the hand of God."

God is a protector before whom fall all petty human weaknesses. Sire, once more leave me with God."

"Then," cried Louis, "say frankly, and at once, that you have never loved me; say that my humility, say that my repentance flatter your pride, but that my grief does not afflict you. Say that the King of France is no longer in your eyes a lover, whose tenderness could afford you happiness, but a despot, whose caprice has broken even the last fibre of sensibility in your heart. Do not say that you seek God, but that you fly the king. No, God is not the accomplice of inflexible resolutions; God lends a willing ear to penitence and remorse. He pardons; He orders us to love one another."

Louise writhed with suffering on hearing these words which awakened the thrill of love even in the remotest of her veins.

"But you cannot then have heard what I have said," she cried.

"What?"

"You have not heard that I am expelled, despised, despicable?"

"I will make you the most respected, the most adored, the most envied person of my court."

"Prove to me that you have not ceased to love me."

"And in what manner?"

"By flying from me now."

"I will prove it to you by never again leaving you."

"But do you believe that I will suffer that, sire? do you believe that I will allow you to declare war against all your family? Do you believe that I will allow you to drive from you, and for me, your mother, your wife, and your sister?"

"Ah! at last you have named them. It was they then who did you this injustice; by the all powerful God I will punish them."

"And this is why the future terrifies me; this is my reason for refusing all; this is why I will not that you should avenge me. Enough of tears, oh! God! enough of grief, enough of lamentations. Oh! never will I be the cause of tears, of grief, of lamentation to any one, be it whom it may. I have grieved too much, I have wept too much, I have too much suffered."

"And my tears, my grief, my lamentations, count you them as nothing?" said the afflicted king.

"Speak not to me thus in the name of heaven!" cried la Vallière, "in the

name of heaven speak not thus to me. I need all the courage I possess to accomplish the sacrifice."

"Louise! Louise! I implore you, command, order, revenge or pardon, but do not forsake me."

"Alas! it is necessary that we should separate, sire."

"Why then, you do not love me."

"Oh! God knows I do."

"Falsehood, falsehood."

"Oh! did I not love you, sire, why I should then allow you to act at your own will, I should allow you to avenge me, I should accept in exchange for the insult to which I have been subjected, the sweet triumph of my pride which you have proposed to me. While on the contrary as you now see, I will not accept the sweet compensation of your love, of your love which is however the blessing of my life, since that I wished to die when I believed that you no longer loved me."

"Well, yes, yes, I now clearly see it. I now declare that you are the most holy, the most deserving to be venerated of all women. No one is so deserving as you, not only of my love and my respect, but of the love and the respect of the whole world; and therefore no one shall be so beloved as you shall be, Louise. No one shall ever possess the empire over me which you do now. Yes, I swear to you that I would at this moment shiver the earth to atoms as it were made of glass, should the world oppose my wishes. You order me to be calm, to pardon. Be it so; I will be calm. You wish to reign by kindness, and by clemency. I will be clement and gentle. Dictate my conduct to me, and I will obey."

"Ah! gracious heaven! what then am I, I, a poor girl, to dictate a single syllable to so great a king as you are?"

"You are my life, my soul; is it not the soul that governs the body?"

"Oh! you do then love me, my dear sire?"

"On both knees, with clasped hands, with all the strength with which God has endowed me. I love you so abundantly that I would smilingly give you my life if you would say but one word."

"You love me?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then I have nothing more in this world to desire. Your hand, sire, and let us say farewell. I have enjoyed in this life my full share of happiness."

"Ch! no, say not that, your life is now beginning. Your happiness is not

of yesterday; it is to-day, to-morrow, for evermore. To you the future; to you all that is mine. No more of these ideas of separation; no more of gloomy despair; love is our god, it is the great need of our souls. You shall live for me as I will live for you."

And prostrating himself before her, he kissed her knees with indescribable transports of joy and gratitude."

"Oh! sire, sire, all this is a dream."

"And why a dream?"

"Because I cannot return to the court. Exiled, how can I again see you? Is it not better to adopt the cloister, where I may inter myself, hap- in the sweet balm your love affords, the last outpourings of your heart, your last protestation?"

"You exiled!" cried Louis XIV. "and who can exile when it is my pleasure to recall?"

"Oh! sire, something which reigns even over the will of kings—the world and public opinion. Reflect maturely upon it; you cannot love a woman who has been expelled, the woman whom your mother has stained with a suspicion, the woman whom your sister has disgraced by punishment. Such a woman is unworthy of you."

"Unworthy! she who is mine, mine only?"

"Yes, it is that precisely, sire; from the moment that she is yours she is unworthy."

"Ah! you are right, Louise; and in you is centred all delicacy of feeling. Well! you shall not be exiled."

"Oh! you have not heard Madame, that is clearly perceptible."

"I will appeal to my mother."

"Oh! you have not seen your mother."

"She also? Poor Louise! all the world was then against you?"

"Yes, yes, poor Louise, who was already bending beneath the storm, when you completed the work by felling her to the earth."

"Oh! forgive me."

"And therefore you will never soften either your mother or your sister; believe me, the evil is irremediable, for I will never allow you to use either violence or authority."

"Well, then, Louise, in order to prove to you how much I love you, I will do one thing—I will go to Madame."

"You?"

"I will make her revoke the sentence—I will force her—"

"Force her? Oh! no, no!"

"That is true; I will soften her."

Louise shook her head.

"I will entreat her, should it be necessary," said Louis. "After that, will you believe in my love for you?"

Louise raised her head.

"Oh! never for me—never thus humiliate yourself; rather leave me here to die."

Louis reflected; his countenance assumed a gloomy expression.

"I will love as much as you have loved," said he; "I will suffer as much as you have suffered; that shall be my expiation in your eyes. Come, mademoiselle, let us throw aside these miserable considerations; let us be great as is our grief; let us be strong as is our love."

And thus speaking, he took her in his arms and clasped her to his breast.

"My only treasure! my life! come now with me," said he.

She made a last effort, in which she concentrated, not her whole will, for her will was already vanquished, but all her strength.

"No," replied she faintly, "no! no! I should die of shame!"

"No! you shall return as a queen! No one is acquainted with your flight—d'Artagnan alone—"

"He then has betrayed me!—he also!"

"And how so?"

"He had sworn—"

"I had sworn not to say a word to the king," said d'Artagnan, putting his manly and intelligent head through the half-opened door; "I kept my word; I spoke to Monsieur de Saint Aignan—it was not my fault that the king heard me, was it, sire?"

"That is most true; forgive him," said the king.

La Vallière smiled, and gave her white, cold hand to d'Artagnan, who gently raised it to his lips.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, "let a carriage be sent for, for mademoiselle."

"Sire," replied the captain, "there is a carriage waiting at the gate."

"Oh! I have the very model of servants," cried the king.

"You have taken time enough to discover that," muttered d'Artagnan, although much flattered by the king's praise.

La Vallière was conquered; after some few slight hesitations she allowed herself to be led from the convent parlor by her royal lover.

But at the moment they were crossing its threshold, she tore herself from the king's arms and rushed back to the stone crucifix, which she kissed, saying—

"My God, thou hast drawn me towards thee. My God, thou hast repulsed me; but thy mercy is infinite. Only, when I return to thee forget that I have wandered from thee, for when I again return it will be never again to leave thee."

The king sobbed bitterly.

D'Artagnan had recourse to his handkerchief, for his eyes were full of tears.

Louis dragged away la Vallière and carried her in his arms to the carriage, and desired d'Artagnan to seat himself in it beside her.

He then got on horseback and set off at a brisk pace towards the Palais Royal, where immediately upon his arrival he sent to inform Madame that she must grant him a moment's audience.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE INTERVIEW WITH MADAME.

FROM the manner in which the king had left the ambassadors even the least clear-sighted had imagined that war would be declared.

The ambassadors themselves, but little acquainted with the interior occurrences of the palace, had taken to themselves the since so celebrated saying "If I be not master of myself I will be so of those who outrage me."

Happily for the destinies of France and Holland, Colbert followed them to give them some explanation. But the queens and Madame being well informed of all that happened in their palace, having heard this sentence, so full of threatening had withdrawn with much alarm and vexation.

Madame, above all, felt that the royal anger would fall upon her, and as she was courageous and haughty to excess, instead of seeking for support from the queen-mother, she had retired to her own apartments, if not without anxiety at all events without any intention of avoiding the combat she foresaw.

From time to time Anne of Austria sent messengers to inquire if the king had returned.

The silence which reigned throughout the palace with regard to this affair, and the disappearance of la Vallière, was a presage of numberless misfortunes to those who were acquainted with the proud and irritable temper of the king.

But Madame remaining firm notwithstanding all these rumors, shut herself up in her own rooms, sent for Montalais to remain with her, and without allowing her own agitation to be apparent, made the young girl tell her all she knew of this event.

At the moment when the eloquent de Montalais was concluding with all sorts of oratorical precautions, and was recommending Madame to be tolerant, as she might in that case demand at any future time reciprocal toleration from the king, Monsieur Malicorne made his appearance to ask an audience of the princess.

De Montalais' worthy friend bore on his features all the signs of the most lively emotion. It was impossible to mistake them. The interview demanded by the king was to be one of the most interesting chapters in the history of the hearts of kings and men.

Madame was agitated by the arrival of her brother-in-law; she did not expect he would have returned so soon, and above all she did not expect so direct a measure on the part of Louis.

Now women who are so expert in carrying on an indirect war, are always less adroit and less powerful when it is necessary to come to a positive face to face combat.

We have before said that Madame was not one of those women who recoil from danger. She had the opposite defect or quality.

She was exaggerated in her valiancy; and therefore the message borne by Malicorne had the effect upon her of a trumpet sounding to arms. She proudly caught up the gauntlet.

Five minutes afterwards the king ascended the staircase.

His color was heightened from having ridden on horseback. His clothes covered with dust and in disorder, contrasted strongly with the beautifully neat and well adjusted costume of Madame, who turned pale even beneath her rouge.

Louis made no sort of preamble; he seated himself. Montalais disappeared. Madame sat down facing the king.

"My sister," said Louis, "you know that Mademoiselle de la Vallière fled

from her apartment this morning, and that she had gone to hide her grief and her despair in a cloister."

While pronouncing these words the voice of the king was singularly agitated.

"It is your majesty who is the first to inform me of this circumstance," replied Madame.

"I should have believed that you would have been apprised of it this morning during the reception of the ambassadors," said the king.

"Yes, sire, from your emotion I divined that something extraordinary had occurred, but without knowing the precise facts."

The king, who was frank and went straight to the point, immediately said:

"Sister, why was it that you dismissed Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Because her services did not please me," drily replied Madame.

The king became absolutely purple, and his eyes gleamed with such fierceness that all the courage of Madame could scarcely enable her to sustain it.

He however restrained his anger, and added:

"It must indeed be some very powerful reason which could induce so kind-hearted a woman as you are to expel and dishonor not only a young girl, but all the family of that young girl. You know that the city has its eyes open upon the conduct of the ladies of the court. To send away a maid of honor is to attribute to her a crime—or at the least a fault. What then is the crime, what then is the fault of Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Since you constitute yourself the protector of Mademoiselle de la Vallière," coldly replied Madame, "I will now enter into explanations which no one has the right to demand from me."

"Not even the king?" cried Louis, putting on his hat with an angry gesture.

"You have called me your sister," replied Madame, "and I am in my own home."

"That matters not," said the young monarch with some degree of shame at having been carried away by anger, "you cannot say, madam, nor can any one in this kingdom, that you have the right not to give explanations when I demand them."

"Since you consider it in this point of view," rejoined Madame with smothered anger, "all I have now to do is

to bow down before your majesty and to remain silent."

"No, do not let us equivocate."

"The protection which you throw over Mademoiselle de la Vallière compels me to respect—"

"Do not let us equivocate. I say again you know that, as the head of the French nobility I am accountable to all for the honor of their families. You drive from you Mademoiselle de la Vallière, or any other person, be she whom she may."

Madame shrugged her shoulders.

"Or any other, I repeat the words," continued the king; "and as by thus acting you dishonor that person, I ask you for an explanation, that I may either confirm or combat the sentence pronounced by you."

"Combat my sentence!" cried Madame haughtily. "What, when I have driven from my house one of my attendants, you would order me to take her back again?"

The king remained silent.

"That would not be merely the excess of power, sire, it would be indecous."

"Madam!"

"Oh! that is a thing which I should revolt against merely in the quality of a woman, as an abuse beyond all dignity; I should no longer be a princess of your race, the daughter of a king! I should be the last of creatures; I should be more humble than the servant who has been dismissed."

The king bounded from his chair with fury.

"It is not a heart," cried he, "that beats within your breast, if you can thus act towards me. Allow me to act with the same degree of rigor."

Sometimes a stray ball in a battle takes effect. This word which the king had uttered without intention struck Madame, and for a moment staggered her. She might some day or other fear a retaliation.

"Be pleased sire," said she, "to explain yourself."

"I ask you, madam, what Mademoiselle de la Vallière has done to offend you."

"She is the most artful meddler in intrigues that I have ever yet known; she was the cause of a duel between two friends, and she has caused herself to be spoken of in such disgraceful terms that every one belonging to the court frowns at the mere mention of her name."

"She! she!" exclaimed the king.

"Under the hypocritical semblance of mildness she conceals a mind replete with artifice and treachery."

"She?"

"You may be mistaken in her, sire, but I know her thoroughly; she is capable of exciting dissensions between the most affectionate relations, and the most intimate friends. You see the discord she has already sown even between us."

"I protest to you"—said the king.

"Sire, consider this one point: we were all living in perfect harmony, when by her made up stories, her artful complainings, she has prejudiced your majesty's mind against me."

"I solemnly protest to you that on no occasion has a bitter word ever escaped her lips. I swear that even in my moments of exasperation, she has never allowed me to threaten any one. I swear that you have not a more devoted, a more respectful friend."

"Friend!" exclaimed Madame, with an expression of supreme disdain.

"Beware, madam," said the king, "you are forgetting that you understand the nature of my feelings, and from that moment all is equalized. Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall be whatever I may please she should be, and to-morrow, if such should be my wish, she shall be ready to ascend a throne."

"She will not have been born upon me, be that as it may, and all that you can do with regard to her is for the future, nothing for the past."

"Madam I have been full of complaisance and civility in my conduct towards you, do not compel me to remember that I am the master here."

"Sire, you have already twice told me so, and I had the honor to inform you that I bowed down before your will."

"Well then, will you grant that which I ask of you? will you re-admit Mademoiselle de la Vallière into your household?"

"And what good purpose would this answer, sire? Since you have a throne to give her, I am too insignificant to protect so great a personage."

"A truce to this malignant and disdainful wit. Grant me her pardon."

"Never."

"You urge me on to dissensions in my family."

"I have my family also, where I will seek a refuge."

"Is this a threat, and can you so far

forget yourself? Do you believe that were you to carry your offence to such a point as that, your relations would side with you?"

"I hope, sire, that you will not compel me to do any thing derogatory to my rank."

"I had hoped that you would have remembered our friendship, that you would have treated me as a brother."

Madame paused a moment.

"It is not being unmindful that you are my brother to refuse to submit to an injustice from your majesty."

"An injustice?"

"Oh! sire, were I to relate to every one the conduct of la Vallière, were the queens to know—"

"Come now, Henrietta, allow your heart to speak; remember that you have loved me, remember that human hearts ought to be as merciful as the heart of our sovereign Master. Be not inflexible to others, pardon la Vallière."

"I cannot; she has offended me."

"But I! I!"

"Sire, for you I would do every thing excepting this."

"Then you counsel me to my despair; you leave me to the last resource of feeble minds; you urge me on to anger and great scandal."

"Sire I counsel you to reason."

"Reason, sister, I have no longer any reason."

"Sire, for mercy's sake."

"Sister, for pity's sake; 'tis the first time that I have ever entreated. Sister, I have now no hope but in you."

"Oh! sire, you weep."

"Yes, with rage and humiliation. To have fallen so low as to be obliged to entreat, to beg, I, the king! During my whole life to come I shall abhor this moment. Sister, in these few moments you have made me endure more mortification than I could have foreseen would await me in the most painful extremities of my life."

And the king, rising from his chair, gave free vent to his tears, and which, in fact, were tears of rage and shame.

Madame was not moved, for even the best of women have no pity when their pride is wounded; but she was fearful that these tears would bear away with them all that was humane in the king's heart.

"Lay your commands upon me, sire," said she, "and as you prefer my humiliation to yours, although mine must be public and manifest to the whole world, while yours is known only to

yourself and me, speak, I will obey the king."

"No, no, Henrietta," cried Louis, transported with gratitude, "you have only yielded to the entreaties of a brother."

"I have no longer a brother since I obey."

"Will you have my whole kingdom for my thanks?"

"How ardently you love when you do really love."

He did not reply. He had taken Madame's hand and covered it with kisses.

"Therefore," said he, "you will receive back this poor girl—you will pardon her—you will soon acknowledge the sweetness, the uprightness of her heart."

"I will receive her into my household."

"No, you will restore your friendship to her."

"I have never liked her."

"Well, then, for my sake you will treat her kindly, will you not, Henrietta?"

"Be it so; I will treat her as a girl under your protection."

The king drew himself up. By this word, which had so fatally escaped her, Madame destroyed the whole merit of her sacrifice. The king no longer owed her any thing.

Ulcerated, mortally wounded, he replied,

"I thank you, madam, and I shall eternally remember the service you have rendered me."

And bowing with an affectation of ceremony he took leave.

Passing before a looking-glass he saw that his eyes were red, and he stamped with rage; but it was too late—d'Artagnan and Malicorne, who were standing near the door, had seen his eyes.

"The king has been weeping," thought Malicorne.

D'Artagnan respectfully approached the king.

"Sire," said he to him in a whisper, "you must go by the small staircase in returning to your apartments."

"And why so?"

"Because the dust of the road has left traces on your face," replied d'Artagnan; "go that way, sire, go that way."

"Mordieux!" said he to himself, after seeing that the king, like a docile child, had followed his advice, "woe

to those who shall make her weep who has caused the king to weep!"

CHAPTER XCIII.

MADemoisELLE DE LA VALLIERE'S HANDKERCHIEF.

MADAME was not of a malignant disposition, she was only passionate.

The king was not imprudent, he was only in love.

They had scarcely entered into this hollow compact which was to recall la Vallière, than both the one and the other endeavored to take advantage of the bargain they had made.

The king wished to see la Vallière at every moment of the day.

Madame, who felt that the king was embittered against her since the explanation scene, would not give up la Vallière without a struggle.

She therefore threw every difficulty in the way of the king's access to her.

And, in fact, in order to approach his mistress, Louis was compelled to pay his court to his sister-in-law.

On this plan was founded the whole of Madame's policy.

As she had chosen a person to second her views, and as this person was Montalais, the king found himself completely surrounded every time he paid a visit to Madame. He was never left alone even for a moment. Madame displayed in their conversations on these occasions a grace and wit which delighted all.

Montalais succeeded her; in a very short time she became altogether insupportable to the king.

And this she had expected.

Then she set Malicorne to work; the latter found means to tell the king that there was at court a very unhappy young person.

The king inquired who this person was.

Malicorne replied that it was Mademoiselle de Montalais.

Then the king declared that it was only right that a person should be unhappy who did all in her power to render others so.

Malicorne explained: Mademoiselle de Montalais was compelled to obey the orders she received.

The king's eyes were opened; he remarked that as soon as he appeared Madame appeared also; that

she was in the corridor until after his departure, whom she accompanied, fearing that he might have an opportunity of conversing with one of the maids of honor.

One evening she went even farther than this.

The king was seated among the ladies; and he held in his hand a small note concealed under his lace ruffle, which he wished to slip into Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hand.

Madame observed the note, and guessed the king's intention; it would have been difficult to prevent the king from moving in any direction he might please.

However, it was necessary to prevent his going up to la Vallière to bid her good evening and let the note fall into her lap, behind her fan or into her handkerchief.

The king, who was on his guard, imagined that a snare was being laid for him.

He rose and without affectation moved his chair nearer to Mademoiselle de Chatillon, with whom he jested for awhile.

They were making rhymes. From Mademoiselle de Chatillon he went to Montalais, and then to Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente. By this skilful manœuvre he had seated himself just opposite to la Vallière, whom he completely hid from the rest.

Madame feigned to be much occupied, and was busy making a correction on the canvas of some tapestry work.

The king showed a corner of the white note to la Vallière, and the latter spread out her handkerchief with a look which implied: "throw the note into it."

Then, as the king had placed his own handkerchief on the arm of his chair he adroitly pushed it off and it fell on the floor.

So that la Vallière managed to slip her own handkerchief on to the arm-chair.

The king a few moments afterwards took the handkerchief, very naturally passed it over his lips as if wiping them, put the note into it, and replaced it on the arm of his chair.

All that la Vallière had to do was to stretch forth her arm to take the handkerchief with its most precious contents.

But Madame had watched the whole manœuvre.

She called to Chatillon.

"Chatillon, pick up the king's handkerchief, if you please, which has fallen on the carpet."

And the young girl having precipitately obeyed, the king having also stooped, and la Vallière having become confused, the other handkerchief was seen on the arm-chair.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," said Madame, "your majesty has two handkerchiefs."

Consequently the king was obliged to put both his own handkerchief and la Vallière's into his pocket. He gained by this a remembrance of his beloved Louise, but she lost by it a quatrain which had cost the king ten hours to compose, and which, perhaps, was in itself worth a whole epic poem.

It would be impossible to describe the anger of the king, and the disappointment of la Vallière.

But after this a most incredible event occurred.

When the king left Madame to return to his own apartments, Malicorne who had been apprised of it, no one can tell how, had stationed himself in the ante-chamber.

The ante-chambers of the Palais Royal are naturally rather dark, and in the evenings, for Madame was not very ceremonious, they were but dimly illuminated.

The king rather liked this faint light. As a general rule, lovers whose minds and hearts are constantly in flames, like no other light than that which is burning in their own hearts and mind.

The ante-chamber, then, was somewhat dark; a single page bore a wax torch before his majesty.

The king was walking slowly, and trying to repress his anger.

Malicorne passed close by the king, even ran against him, and asked his pardon with the most perfect humility; but the king, who was in very bad humor, treated Malicorne very harshly, who slunk off as quietly as possible.

Louis went to bed, having that evening had some trifling quarrel with the queen, and the next morning, at the moment he was about to repair to his cabinet, he was seized with a desire to kiss la Vallière's handkerchief.

He called his valet de chambre.

"Bring me," said he, "the coat which I wore last night, but be very careful not to touch any thing that may be in the pockets."

The order was executed; the king

himself searched the pockets of the coat.

He found but one handkerchief in them, his own; that of la Vallière had disappeared.

As he was racking his brain with conjectures and suspicions on this singular occurrence, a letter from la Vallière was brought to him. It was conceived in the following terms:

"How amiable it is of you, my dear lord, to have sent me those beautiful verses; how ingenious and persevering is your love! Who could do otherwise than love you?"

"What can all this mean?" thought the king, "there must be some mistake."

"Make good search," said he, to the valet de chambre, "for a handkerchief which must have been in my pocket, and if you do not find it, or if you have touched it—"

He however thought better of it. To make a state affair of the loss of this handkerchief was opening a whole chronicle of scandal; he added:

"I had in that handkerchief an important note which had slipped in between its folds."

"But, sire," replied the valet de chambre, "your majesty had but one handkerchief, and here it is."

"That is true," cried the king, grinding his teeth, "that is true. Oh! poverty, how do I envy thee; happy is he who searches his own pockets, and takes from them his handkerchiefs and notes!"

He again read the letter, wondering by what chance the quatrain could have reached the hands of la Vallière. There was a postscript to the note which he had not before observed.

"I send you by your messenger this answer so unworthy of your lines."

"Ah! this is as it should be; I shall now know something," cried he, joyously.

"Who is without there?" said he, "and who was it that brought this note?"

"M. Malicorne," timidly replied the valet de chambre.

"Desire him to come in."

Malicorne came into the room.

"You have come from Mademoiselle de la Vallière," said the king, with a sigh.

"Yes, sire,"

"And you took to Mademoiselle de la Vallière something on my behalf."

"Who I, sire?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh! no indeed, sire, no indeed."

Mademoiselle de la Vallière positively tells me so."

"Oh! sire, Mademoiselle de la Vallière must be mistaken."

The king frowned.

"What means this child's play?" said he, "explain this to me. Why does Mademoiselle de la Vallière call you my messenger? What was it that you carried to that lady? Speak, and quickly, sir."

"Sire, I carried to Mademoiselle de la Vallière a pocket handkerchief, and that was all."

"A handkerchief? What handkerchief?"

"Sire, at the moment when I had the misfortune last night to run against the sacred person of your majesty, a misfortune which I shall all my life deplore, and above all after the displeasure which you evinced towards me, then, sire, I remained motionless with despair. Your majesty was at too great a distance to hear my humble apologies, and I all at once perceived something white upon the ground."

"Ah!" exclaimed the king.

"I stooped down, it was a handkerchief. I conceived the idea that on running against your majesty, I had by some means jolted this handkerchief out of your pocket: while respectfully pressing it between my fingers, I felt an embroidered cypher, and on examining found it to be the cypher of Mademoiselle de la Vallière; I presumed that before entering the apartment of her royal highness she had accidentally dropped it, and I hastened to return it to her as she was coming out, and I beg your majesty to believe me, this was all that I delivered to Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

Malicorne appeared so ingenuous, so much afflicted, so humble, that the king was excessively pleased while listening to him.

He felt as greatly obliged to him, as he could have done had he rendered him some most essential service.

"This is the second fortunate meeting I have had with you, sir," said the king, "you may calculate upon my friendship."

The true and simple fact is that Malicorne had stolen the handkerchief from the king's pocket, as dexterously as any of the pick pockets of the good city of Paris could have done.

Madame was always ignorant of this

story; but Montalais allowed la Vallière to suspect it, and la Vallière at a later period related it to the king, who laughed excessively on hearing it, and proclaimed Malicorne to be a great politician.

Louis XIV. was right in thinking so, and it is well known that he was a good judge of men.

CHAPTER XCIV.

IN WHICH MUCH IS SAID OF GARDENERS,
LADDERS, AND MAIDS OF HONOR.

UNHAPPILY the working of such miracles could not always continue, whereas the ill-humor of Madame appeared to be without end.

Before eight days had elapsed, things had gone such a length that the king could not even look at la Vallière without perceiving that suspicious eyes were fixed upon them both.

Whenever a party into the country was proposed, Madame was always ready with some excuse to avoid it; pretexes of indisposition were the most general; and this not to expose herself to the recurrence of the scene of the storm, or that of the royal oak in the forest of Fontainebleau; thanks to these indispositions she did not leave the palace, and the maids of honor necessarily remained with her.

As to nocturnal visits, that was out of the question; there was no chance for them.

In this respect the king had from his very first attempt, received a very painful check.

As at Fontainebleau, he had taken Saint Aignan with him in order to pay a visit to la Vallière. On reaching her apartment they found there only Made-moiselle de Tonnay Charente, who at once cried out fire and thieves, and so vociferously that a legion of waiting women, and a host of pages had rushed to her assistance, and Saint Aignan who had remained alone to save the honor of his master, who fled on hearing the astounding uproar, received from the queen-mother and Madame a very severe lecture.

Besides this, he, on the following morning, was presented with two challenges from the family of Mortemart.

To arrange these the king was compelled to intervene.

This mistake had occurred in conse-

quence of Madame's having suddenly ordered a change in the lodgings of her maids of honor, and la Vallière and Montalais had been called to sleep in a small cabinet adjoining the bed chamber of their mistress.

Therefore there was no hope of further communication, not even by letter; to write under the eyes of so vigilant an Argus, and of so unequal a temper as Madame, would have been exposing themselves to great risk.

It will readily be imagined that all these needle points aimed at him, threw the young lion into a state of indescribable irritation and increasing anger.

The king worked his blood into a state of fever by endeavoring to invent some mode for obtaining an interview, and as he did not ask for advice from either Malicorne or d'Artagnan, the means could not be found.

Malicorne had now and then some heroic bursts of fancy by which he endeavored to induce the king to grant him his entire confidence.

But whether it was from shame or from mistrust, the king although he appeared at first to nibble at the bait, but soon abandoned the hook.

Once, for instance, as the king was one evening walking across the garden and looking sorrowfully at the windows of Madame's apartment, Malicorne stumbled over a ladder under a box border and said to Manicamp who was walking with him behind the king, and who had neither seen nor kicked against any thing,

"Did you not see that I just now stumbled over a ladder and that I was near falling?"

"No," replied Manicamp, with his usual absence of mind, "but you did not fall, it would seem to me."

"That matters not; it is nevertheless dangerous to leave ladders lying about so carelessly."

"Yes, a man might hurt himself, and above all if he is absent."

"It is not that I mean, either," rejoined Malicorne, "what I did mean is that it is dangerous to leave ladders so near the windows of the maids of honor."

The king gave an almost imperceptible start.

"And why so?" inquired Manicamp.

"Speak louder," whispered Malicorne to him, joggng his arm.

"And why so?" repeated Manicamp in a louder tone.

The king listened.

"This is a twenty-foot ladder," replied Malicorne; "and that is precisely the height of the cornice of those windows."

Manicamp, instead of making an observation, was again dreaming.

"Ask me what windows?" whispered Malicorne, again prompting him.

"But of what windows are you speaking?" said Manicamp aloud.

"Why Madame's windows."

"Hey?"

"Oh! I do not say that any one would dare to climb up to Madame's windows," continued Malicorne; "but in her cabinet, which is separated from her room by a thin partition, sleep Mesdemoiselles de la Vallière and Montalais, who are very pretty persons."

"By only a thin partition?" said Manicamp.

"Look now; there is a tolerably brilliant light in Madame's apartment: do you see those two windows?"

"Yes."

"And that window next to the two others, in which the light is not so vivid—do you see that?"

"Perfectly well."

"That is the window of the maids of honor. See now, the weather is warm, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière is at this moment opening her window. Ah! what things might a bold lover say to her, did he but know that a ladder twenty feet long, precisely the height of those windows, was so near at hand."

"But she is not alone you said just now; Mademoiselle de Montalais is with her."

"Mademoiselle de Montalais is no obstacle; she is her friend from infancy—entirely devoted to her; a perfect well into which may be thrown all secrets one may wish never to be discovered."

Not a word of this conversation had escaped the king's ears.

Malicorne had observed that the king had even slackened his pace to give him time to conclude.

And therefore as soon as he reached the gate he dismissed all his attendants with the exception of Malicorne.

This surprised no one, for they all knew that the king was in love, and he was suspected of composing verses by moonlight.

And although there was no moon on that particular evening, the king might nevertheless have verses to compose

The courtiers all withdrew.

Then the king turned towards Malicorne, who was respectfully waiting till the king should address him.

"What was that you were saying just now about a ladder, M. Malicorne?" he inquired.

"Of a ladder, sire! did I speak of a ladder?" And he raised his eyes to heaven as if endeavoring to discover the words which had escaped from his lips.

"Yes, of a ladder, which you said was twenty feet in length."

Ah! yes, sire, that is true; but I was speaking to M. de Manicamp, and I should have been silent had I imagined your majesty could have heard us."

"And why would you have been silent?"

"Because I should not have wished to get the gardener scolded, who left it there, poor devil!"

"Oh! do not be alarmed for him—come now, what is this ladder?"

"Would your majesty wish to see it?"

"Yes."

"Nothing can be more easy; it is there, sire."

"Among the box?"

"Precisely."

"Show it to me."

Malicorne retraced his steps and led the king to the spot where the ladder was lying.

"Here it is, sire," said he.

"Draw it out a little."

Malicorne pulled the ladder into the walk.

The king walked with measured steps the length of the ladder.

"Hum!" he ejaculated; "you say that this ladder is twenty feet long."

"Yes, sire."

"Twenty feet! it does not seem so much to me; I do not think it so long."

"It cannot be seen so well in this way, sire. If the ladder were placed upright against a tree, or against a wall for example, one could judge better, seeing that comparison would greatly assist—"

"Oh! that matters not, M. Malicorne, but I can scarcely believe that ladder to be twenty feet long."

"I well know that your majesty has a good eye, and yet I would wager upon it."

The king shook his head.

"There is an infallible method of verifying it," observed Malicorne.

"And what is that?"

"Every body knows, sire, that the ground floor of the palace is nineteen feet in height."

"That is true, it can be ascertained."

"Well then, sire, by placing the ladder against the wall, its length can be known."

"That is true."

Malicorne lifted the ladder as if it had been a feather, and stood it up against the wall."

He selected, or rather chance selected, the very window of la Vallière's cabinet, for the trial of the experiment.

The ladder reached the bottom of the cornice, or it may be said the sill-stone of the window, so that a man of middling stature, like the king, might, by standing on the highest round but one, with great ease converse with the persons who inhabited the room.

The ladder was scarcely placed against the window, than the king, throwing aside the species of comedy he had been acting, began to climb up the rounds, while Manicamp held the ladder steady.

But he had scarcely reached the half of his aerial ascent when a patrol of the Swiss guards appeared in the garden, and advanced straight towards the ladder.

The king descended precipitately, and concealed himself in a thicket of shrubs.

Malicorne in a moment comprehended that it was necessary he should sacrifice himself. Were he also to hide himself, the guards would search till they found either him or the king, and perhaps both.

It was therefore better that he only should be found.

And consequently Malicorne concealed himself so bunglingly that he alone was arrested.

Immediately afterwards Malicorne was conducted to the guard-house, where he gave his name, and was at once recognized.

During this time the king, gliding from thicket to thicket, at last reached the small private door leading to his own apartments, much humiliated, and above all much disappointed.

And the more so as the noise of the arrest had drawn la Vallière and Montalais to their windows, and Madame herself had appeared at hers between two wax lights, inquiring the cause of the disturbance.

In the mean while Malicorne had ap-

pealed to d'Artagnan. The latter came to his assistance the moment he received his message.

But in vain did he endeavor to explain his reasons, in vain was it that d'Artagnan understood them; and in vain, also, did these two men with their inventive and acute minds, endeavor to give a color to the adventure. There was but one resource for Malicorne, that of appearing to have endeavored to enter the room of Montalais. M. de Saint Aignan had appeared to have wished to break open the door of that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente.

Madame was inflexible, and for a two fold reason, first, that if, in fact, M. Malicorne had wished to enter her apartment, and at night, through the window, and by means of a ladder, to see Montalais, it was on the part of Malicorne a punishable attempt, and one that ought to receive punishment.

And the other reason was, that if Malicorne, instead of acting on his own account, was acting as an intermediate agent between la Vallière and a person whom she would not name, his crime was even greater still, because love, which might be an excuse for all, did not exist in that case to excuse him.

Madame therefore cried out most loudly, and had Malicorne dismissed from the household of Monsieur, without reflecting, blinded as she was by anger, that Malicorne and Montalais held her in their power, from their knowledge of the visit she had paid to the Count de Guiche, and by many other secrets of as delicate a nature.

Montalais, who was altogether furious, would at once have sought revenge. Malicorne demonstrated to her that the support of the king was of more importance than all the disgrace with which he might be visited, and that it was a proud and fortunate circumstance to be persecuted for the king.

Malicorne was right. Besides, although she was a woman, he at length brought Montalais over to his opinion.

And then, on his side, let us hasten to say, the king assisted in consoling them.

In the first place he ordered the sum of fifty thousand livres to be paid to Malicorne as a compensation for the place he had lost.

After that he gave him an office in his own household, happy thus to revenge himself upon Madame for all that she had caused him and la Vallière to suffer.

But having no longer a Malicorne in Madame's service to steal his pocket handkerchief, and to take measure of his ladders, the poor lover was altogether destitute.

There was no longer any hope of getting near la Vallière as long as she should remain in the Palais Royal.

All the dignities, and all the riches of the world could not better his position.

Happily Malicorne was constantly on the *qui vive*.

He managed matters so well that one day he fell in with Montalais. It is true that Montalais had been, on her side, doing all she could to fall in with Malicorne.

"What do you now do at night in Madame's apartments?" inquired he, of the young girl.

"Why at night I sleep to be sure," she replied.

"How, you say that you actually sleep?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But it is very wrong indeed to sleep. It is highly improper that a young girl suffering under such great affliction as you do should sleep at all."

"And from what affliction is it that I am suffering so dreadfully?"

"Are you not perfectly in despair from my absence?"

"Why no, since you received fifty thousand livres, and the king has given you a good place."

"That matters not; you must be horribly afflicted at not seeing me as you used to do formerly. And you are in despair, above all, that I should have lost the confidence of Madame. Is not that true? come now, speak out."

"Oh! that is very true."

"Well, then, this affliction, this despair prevents you from sleeping all night long: then you sob, you sigh, you moan, you use your handkerchief, and very noisily, and that ten times a minute."

"Why, my dear Malicorne, Madame will not allow the slightest noise in her apartment."

"By heaven! I know that full well. I know she cannot bear any thing of the kind, and therefore I tell you that on finding your grief to be so excessive she will very soon turn you out of the cabinet you occupy."

"I understand you now."

"That is really very fortunate."

"But what will happen then?"

"The consequence will be that I

Vallière, on finding herself separated from you, will groan, and moan, and make such piteous lamentations, that Madame will be in despair also."

"Then they would put her into another room."

"Precisely."

"Yes, but into which room?"

"Which?"

"Ah! ah! you are already at your wit's ends, good mister inventor."

"Not in the least. Whichever that room may be it will always be better than one so close to Madame."

"That is true."

"Well, try to begin your lamentations this very night; let them be as loud and as affecting as those of Jeremiah."

"I will not fail to do so."

"And give a hint upon the subject to la Vallière."

"Do not fear her. She weeps enough as it is, but silently."

"Well, let her weep aloud."

And they parted.

CHAPTER XCV.

WHICH TREATS OF JOINER'S WORK, AND IN WHICH SOME DETAILS ARE GIVEN AS TO THE ART AND MYSTERY OF BUILDING STAIRCASES.

THE advice given to Montalais was communicated to la Vallière, who acknowledged that it was not deficient in wisdom, and who, after some objections arising more from her timidity than her coldness, resolved on putting it in execution.

This invention of two women weeping and filling the apartments of Madame with groans and lamentable noises was the master-piece of Malicorne.

As nothing is so true as the improbable—so natural as the romantic, this species of Arabian tale produced the desired effect and succeeded admirably with Madame.

She began by ordering Montalais into another room.

Then three days, or rather, we should say, three nights afterwards, having sent away Montalais, she sent away la Vallière.

She ordered a room to be prepared for her in the small apartments situated above the apartments of the gentlemen.

One story, that is to say, a floor

separated the maids of honor from the officers and gentlemen of the household.

A private staircase under the safe-guard of Madame de Navailles led up to these rooms from the principal apartment.

But for greater security Madame de Navailles, who had heard something of the former attempts of his majesty, had the windows grated with iron as well as the chimnies.

There was therefore every precaution taken for the safe-guard of the honor of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whose room had more the appearance of a cage than any other thing.

Mademoiselle de la Vallière, when she was in her room, and she was there frequently, as Madame did not often occupy her in her service since she knew she was under the safe keeping of Madame de Navailles—Mademoiselle de la Vallière had therefore no other amusement than that of looking out of her window between the bars.

Now, it happened one morning when she was looking out as usual, she perceived Malicorne at a window parallel with her own.

He held in his hand a carpenter's levelling lead, was examining the building and making algebraical calculations on a paper.

He did not, in this attitude, ill resemble an engineer officer who from the corner of a trench notes down the angles of a bastion and the height of a fortress.

La Vallière recognized Malicorne and bowed to him.

Malicorne replied by a very low bow, and disappeared from the window.

She was astonished at this cold mode of greeting, which was so contrary to the usual good temper of Malicorne, but she remembered that the poor fellow had lost his place through her, and that his feelings could not be very kindly towards her on that account, since, in all probability, she would never be in a position to restore to him what he had lost.

She knew how to forgive injuries, and therefore she could compassionate misfortune.

La Vallière would have consulted Montalais upon the subject had Montalais been there, but she was absent.

It was the hour when Montalais wrote her letters.

Suddenly la Vallière saw something

dart out of the window at which Malicorne had been standing, traverse the intermediate space between the bars of her window and roll upon the floor of her room.

With much curiosity she stooped down and picked up the mysterious missile.

It was one of those bobbins on which ladies wind silk.

Only instead of silk a small piece of paper was wound round the bobbin.

La Vallière unrolled and read :

"**MADemoisELLE** ---I am anxious to know two things.

"The first is to know whether the floor of your room is of wood or tiles.

"The second is to know at what distance your bed is placed from the window.

"Excuse my importunity, and be pleased to give me an answer by the same method which conveys my letter to you, that is to say, by means of the bobbin.

"Only instead of throwing it into my room as I have thrown it into yours, which you would find more difficult to do than I, be only so obliging as to let it fall from your window.

"Believe me, above all,
mademoiselle, your very
humble and very respectful
servant, **MALICORNE.**"

P. S. Write your answer, if you please, on this same letter.

"Ah! poor lad!" exclaimed la Vallière, "he must surely have gone mad."

And she directed towards her correspondent, who could be seen in the shadow of the room, a look replete with affectionate compassion.

Malicorne at once comprehended the expression of her countenance and shook his head as if replying to her thought.

"No, no; be not alarmed, I am not mad."

She smiled doubtfully.

"No, no," he replied by gestures, "the head is sound enough."

And he pointed to his head.

Then moving his hand like a man who is writing rapidly.

"Come, write to me," continued he in pantomime, with a sort of supplicating gesture.

La Vallière did not see that there could be any impropriety, even were

he mad, in doing that which Malicorne requested; she took a pencil and wrote "Wood."

Then she walked across the room from her bedstead to the window counting her steps and wrote down

"TEN STEPS."

Having done this she again looked at Malicorne, who bowed to her and made a sign that he was going down stairs.

La Vallière readily understood that it was for the purpose of receiving the bobbin.

She approached the window and conformably with Malicorne's instructions she let fall the letter.

The bobbin was still rolling on the paving stones when Malicorne rushed out, ran after it, and picked it up, and began to take off its rind as a monkey would that of an orange, and hurried off instantly towards M. de Saint Aignan's apartment.

Saint Aignan had selected, or rather had solicited to be allowed to occupy an apartment the nearest possible to the king, like to those plants which court the sun's rays that they may more fruitfully develope themselves.

His apartment consisted of two rooms in the quarter of the building occupied by Louis XIV.

M. de Saint Aignan was proud of this proximity which gave him such easy access to his majesty, and the favor of some unexpected meetings.

He was occupied at the time of which we are now speaking, in having his two rooms magnificently furnished, with rich tapestry and carpets, calculating on the honor of an occasional visit from the king; for his majesty, since the commencement of his passion for la Vallière had chosen Saint Aignan for his confidant, and could not exist without him neither by night nor day.

Malicorne desired to be admitted to the count's presence and met with no difficulty because he was known to be well considered by the king, and the credit of the one is always a bait for the other.

Saint Aignan asked his visiter, if he had some great news to impart to him.

"Some very great," replied Malicorne.

"Ha! ha!" cried Saint Aignan, curious as all favorites are, "and what are they?"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière has removed."

"What say you?" cried Saint Aignan, opening his eyes widely.

"It is the fact."

"She was lodged in Madame's room."

"Precisely. But Madame became tired of the neighborhood, and installed her in a room just above your future apartment."

"How! *up yonder!*" exclaimed Saint Aignan with surprise, and pointing with his finger to the upper stories.

"No," replied Malicorne, "*down yonder,*" and he pointed to the pile of building on the opposite side of the court-yard.

"Why then do you say that her room is above my apartments?"

"Because I am certain that your apartments ought naturally to be under la Vallière's room."

Saint Aignan on hearing these words gazed at poor Malicorne with a look similar in expression to that which la Vallière had addressed to him only a quarter of an hour before.

That is to say that he also thought him mad.

"Monsieur," said Malicorne, "I request permission to answer your present thought."

"How! my thought?"

"Undoubtedly. It appears to me that you have not clearly understood that which I have been saying to you."

"I acknowledge it."

"Well, then. You are perhaps aware that under the apartments of the maids of honor are lodged the officers of Monsieur's household."

"Yes, because Manicamp, de Wardes and others, are lodged there."

"Precisely; well, sir, only consider the singularity of the chance; the two rooms allotted to M. de Guiche are exactly under the two occupied by Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Well! and what follows—"

"Well! it follows—that these two rooms are now at liberty, since M. de Guiche, having been wounded, is ill at Fontainebleau."

"I swear to you, my dear sir, that I cannot at all divine your meaning."

"Ah! if I had the good fortune to call myself Saint Aignan, I should immediately have divined it."

"And what would you in that case do?"

"I would immediately exchange the rooms I occupy here for the rooms

which M. de Guiche does not occupy down yonder."

"Can you think of it?" cried Saint Aignan disdainfully; "would you have me abandon the first post of honor? the neighborhood of the king! a privilege granted only to princes of the blood, to dukes and peers.—Why my dear M. de Malicorne, you must allow me to tell you that you are mad."

"Sir," gravely replied the young man, "you have fallen into two errors, I call myself plainly Malicorne without the *de*, and I am not mad."

Then taking a folded paper from his pocket.

"Listen to me," said he, "and afterwards I will show you this."

"I am all attention," said Saint Aignan.

"You know that Madame watches over Mademoiselle de la Vallière as Argus did over the nymph Io."

"Of that I am aware."

"You know that the king has endeavored, but in vain, to speak to the prisoner; and neither you nor I have succeeded in procuring him that satisfaction."

"You have good reason to remember that, my poor Malicorne."

"Well then, what do you suppose would happen to the person who should bring about a meeting between the two lovers?"

"Oh! the king would not limit his gratitude to a trifle."

"M. de Saint Aignan?"

"Go on."

"Would you not be pleased to taste a little royal gratitude?"

"Certes, the favor of my master, after I had done my duty, could not be otherwise than precious to me."

"Then, cast your eyes upon this paper, count," said Malicorne, unfolding it.

"What is this paper—a plan?"

"It is that of the two rooms of M. de Guiche, which in all probability, are about to become your two rooms."

"Oh! no, let what may happen—"

"And why so?"

"Because the two rooms I now have are coveted by too many noblemen, to whom I certainly will not abandon them. By the Duke de Roquelaure, by M. de Ferté, by M. de Dangeau."

"Then I will leave you, count, and I shall offer to one of the gentlemen you have mentioned my plan, with all the advantages attached to it."

"But why do you not keep them for

yourself?" inquired Saint Aignan, with mistrust.

"Because the king would never do me the honor ostensibly to pay me a visit, while he could go with perfect propriety to see either of these gentlemen."

"What! the king would go to visit one of these gentlemen?"

"By Heaven! he would go ten times a day. How can you ask me whether the king would go into an apartment which brings him nearer to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"A pretty bringing nearer truly; with a whole story still between them."

Malicorne unfolded the letter paper, which had been wound round the bobbin.

"Remark, count, that the floor of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room is merely a thin wooden one."

"Well?"

"Well, you would hire a working carpenter, who, being shut up in your room, and without knowing even the place he is working in, would cut through your ceiling, and consequently the floor of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room."

"Ah! good Heaven!" exclaimed Saint Aignan, as if dazzled by the idea.

"Did you speak, sir?" said Malicorne.

"I said that this is a most daring idea, sir."

"It will appear a very simple one to the king, I can assure you."

"Lovers never think of danger," observed Saint Aignan.

"What danger do you apprehend in this, count?"

"Why the cutting through such an opening as that would make a most frightful noise; the whole palace would resound with it."

"Oh! my good count, I am well assured that the workman I would point out to you would not make the slightest noise. He would cut through a block six feet square, with a saw, deadened with tow, and no one, not even persons in the next room to him, would perceive that he was at work."

"Ah! my dear M. Malicorne, you astound me, you stupefy me."

"I continue," tranquilly replied Malicorne, "in the room of which you will cut through the ceiling; you understand me, do you not?"

"Yes."

"You will have a staircase built

which will either allow Mademoiselle de la Vallière to descend into your apartment, or the king to ascend to Mademoiselle de la Vallière's."

"But that staircase will be seen."

"No, for on your side it will be concealed by a partition, on which you can have hung tapestry similar to that which covers the rest of the apartment. In Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room it will not be seen at all, for there will only be a trap, which will open under the bed."

"In good truth, 'tis marvellously well imagined!" said Saint Aignan, whose eyes began to sparkle.

"And now, count, it is not necessary that I should compel you to acknowledge that the king would frequently resort to a room where such a staircase would be raised. I believe that M. Dangeau, particularly, would be struck with my idea, and I will now go and explain it to him."

"Ah! dear M. Malicorne!" exclaimed Saint Aignan, "you forget that it was to me you first spoke upon the subject, and consequently that I have right to the priority."

"Do you desire to have the preference?"

"Do I desire it! I believe I do, indeed!"

"The fact is, Monsieur de Saint Aignan, it is a commission for the first promotion which I am now presenting to you—perhaps even a good dukedom."

"It is at least," replied Saint Aignan, coloring with delight, "an opportunity of proving to the king that he is not wrong in calling me, as he sometimes does, his friend; an opportunity, my dear Monsieur de Malicorne, which I shall owe to you."

"Will you not be a little forgetful of it?" asked Malicorne, with an expressive smile.

"It will be my glory to remember it," replied the count.

"As to myself, sir, I am not the king's friend, I am but his servant."

"Yes, and if you think there is a blue riband for me hanging from this staircase, I am of opinion that for you there will be a scroll of letters of nobility."

Malicorne bowed.

"The only question now is as to my removal," continued Saint Aignan.

"I do not imagine the king will in any way object to it; ask him for his permission."

"At this very moment I will run to him."

"And I will go in search of the joiner whose services we require."

"When shall I have him?"

"This evening."

"Do not forget the precautions."

"I will bring him here with his eyes bandaged."

"And I will send you one of my carriages."

"Without arms upon it."

"With one of my lackeys out of livery: 'tis agreed."

"'Tis well, count."

"But la Vallière?"

"Well, what of her?"

"What will she say on perceiving this operation going on?"

"I can assure you that she will take much interest in it."

"I also believe that."

"I am even certain that should the king not have sufficient audacity to ascend to her room, she would have sufficient curiosity to come down."

"Let us hope," said Saint Aignan.

"Yes, let us hope," repeated Malicorne.

"I am now going to the king."

"And you will do marvellously well."

"At what hour am I to expect my carpenter?"

"At eight o'clock."

"And how much time do you estimate it will take him to saw the square trap?"

"Why, not more than about two hours; then he must have time to finish what are called the dove-tailings. One night and a portion of the following day will suffice, and therefore, with the staircase, we must calculate it will require altogether but two days."

"Two days! that is a very long time."

"The deusel! when people pretend to open a door to Paradise they must allow time enough, at least, for the door to be a decent one."

"You are right; farewell, then, till this evening, dear Monsieur Malicorne. I will have every thing in readiness for my removal the night after to-morrow."

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE DRIVE BY TORCH-LIGHT.

SAINT AIGNAN, delighted with all he had just heard from Malicorne,

enchanted with the prospect which it held out to him, went in the first place to the two rooms allotted to de Guiche.

He, who only a quarter of an hour previously would not have given up his apartment for a million, was ready to purchase, even if they cost a million, the two thrice happy rooms which he now coveted.

But no such extravagance was necessary, he had not to submit to any such exaction. M. de Guiche did not even know that these rooms had been allotted to him, and moreover was still suffering too much from his wounds to pay any attention to his residence in the palace.

Saint Aignan therefore had de Guiche's rooms made over to him.

On the other hand, M. Dangeau had the two rooms, which Saint Aignan occupied, promised to him on his making a present of six thousand livres to the count's intendant, and thought that he had made a golden bargain.

The two rooms Dangeau then tenanted were to become the future lodgings of de Guiche.

And all this without our being able positively to affirm that in this complicated removal de Guiche would ever inhabit the two rooms in question.

As to M. Dangeau he was so transported with joy that he did not even give himself the trouble of imagining that Saint Aignan must have some ulterior and powerful interest in thus vacating his apartment.

An hour had scarcely elapsed after the new resolution formed by Saint Aignan when he was put in possession of the two rooms, and Malicorne entered Saint Aignan's room escorted by upholsterers.

During this time the king was asking for Saint Aignan; messengers were sent to his apartment and found there only Dangeau. Dangeau sent them on to Guiche's rooms, and there they found Saint Aignan.

But all this occasioned some delay, and the king had already evinced his impatience two or three times when Saint Aignan, heated and out of breath, entered his royal master's room.

"You then also abandon me!" cried Louis XIV., in much the same tone of lamentation in which Caesar had uttered, eighteen hundred years previously, the celebrated *tu quoque*.

"Sire," said Saint Aignan, "I do

not abandon the king, for on the contrary I was at this moment busy with my removal."

"What removal? I thought that your removal had been completed three days since."

"Yes, sire. But I am not comfortable in my present rooms, and I am going to the opposite wing."

"Did I not say that you also were abandoning me?" exclaimed the king. "Oh! but this is really going beyond all bounds. Thus, there was but one woman in whom my heart felt interested, and my whole family is leagued together to tear her from me. I had but one friend to whom I confided my great grief, and who assisted me in bearing the weight of it, and this friend has become tired of my bewailings, and leaves me even without requesting leave of absence."

Saint Aignan laughed outright.

The king immediately divined that there was some mystery beneath this want of respect.

"What then has happened?" cried Louis, with returning hope.

"It happens, sire, that the friend whom the king calumniates is about endeavoring to restore to his king the happiness which he has lost."

"You are about to obtain for me an interview with la Vallière?" cried Louis XIV.

"Sire, I cannot yet answer for it, but—"

"But—"

"But I hope to do so."

"Oh! how? how? Give me the particulars, Saint Aignan. I must know your project. I will aid it with all my power."

"Sire," replied Saint Aignan, "I do not yet rightly know how I am to manage to bring about this end, but I have every reason to believe that by to-morrow—"

"To-morrow, say you?"

"Yes, sire."

"Oh! what happiness. But why do you remove?"

"In order to serve you better."

"And how by your removal can you serve me better?"

"Do you know the position of the two rooms which were set apart for the Count de Guiche?"

"Yes."

"Then you know where I am going."

"Undoubtedly; but this does not give me any further information."

"How? do you not understand, sire,

that above this new lodging of mine there are two rooms?"

"What rooms?"

"The one is that of Mademoiselle de Montalais, and the other—"

"The other is that of la Vallière, Saint Aignan."

"You are jesting, sire."

"Oh! Saint Aignan, 'tis true; yes, 'tis true, Saint Aignan: 'tis a most happy idea, the idea of a friend, of a poet; by bringing me nearer to her when the whole universe seems bent on separating us; thou art more valuable to me than Pylades was to Orestes, than Patroclus to Achilles."

"Sire," said Saint Aignan, with a smile, "I doubt that were your majesty acquainted with my projects, and of their full extent, you would continue to bestow on me but pompous epithets. Ah! sire, I know some more trivial ones which certain puritans of the court will not fail to apply to me when they shall be informed of that which I calculate on effecting for your majesty."

"Saint Aignan I am dying with impatience, I am positively consuming. Saint Aignan, I will not wait till to-morrow. To-morrow! why till then is an eternity."

"And yet, sire, if you please, you must leave the palace presently, and divert your impatience by a good long drive."

"With you, be it so; we will talk over your projects; we will speak of her."

"Not so, sire; I remain here."

"With who, then, am I to ride out?"

"With the ladies."

"Ah! by my faith I will not, Saint Aignan."

"Sire, it is necessary."

"No, no; a thousand times no; I will no more expose myself to the horrible torture of being within two paces of her, see her, even graze her dress when passing by her, and yet not dare to speak to her. No, I renounce this torment which you consider a happiness, and which is a torture that sears my eyes, and crushes my heart; to meet her in the presence of strangers without being able even to whisper to her that I love, when my whole being reveals my love, and betrays me to all eyes! No, I have sworn to myself that I will no longer endure this, and I will keep my oath."

"And yet, sire, listen to me attentively for a moment."

"I will hear nothing, Saint Aignan."

"That being the case I shall continue, sire; it is urgent, sire, understand me well, I say urgent, most urgent even, that Madame and her maids of honor should be absent from the palace at least two hours."

"You confuse me, Saint Aignan."

"It is painful to me to be compelled to command my king, but in this particular circumstance I must command him. Sire, I must either have a hunting party or a riding excursion."

"But this excursion, this hunting party, would be considered a caprice, an eccentricity. By evincing so hurried a determination I shall unveil to the whole court a heart that is no longer its own master. Is it not already said that I am dreaming of conquering the whole world, but that before doing this I ought to commence by conquering myself?"

"Those who say that, sire, are factious and impertinent persons; but be they what they may, if your majesty prefers listening to them I have nothing further to say. Then to-morrow must be deferred to some indeterminate period?"

"Saint Aignan, I will go out this evening. To-night I will take a drive to Saint Germain by torchlight, and I will sleep there. I will breakfast there, and shall be at Paris again by three o'clock. Will that suit you?"

"Precisely."

"I will set out to-night at eight o'clock."

"Your majesty has guessed the very minute."

"And will you not tell me any thing as to your intentions?"

"The fact is, that I cannot tell you any thing. Industry has some effect in the affairs of this world, sire, but chance plays so great a part in it, that I have the habit of leaving it as small a share as possible, certain that it will arrange matters so as always to take the larger one."

"Well, I abandon myself entirely to you."

"And you are right in doing so."

Comforted in this way, the king went straightway to Madame's apartment, where he announced the projected drive by torchlight.

Madame at once conceived that this sudden project of a ride by torchlight was a plot of the king to converse with la Vallière, whether upon the road aided by the darkness, or in some other manner, but she took good care not to

allow her brother-in-law to perceive that she entertained such a suspicion, and accepted the invitation with smiles upon her lips.

She gave orders immediately and aloud to her maids of honor to prepare to accompany her, reserving to herself the faculty of taking such measures in the evening as should best thwart his majesty's amours.

Then, when she was alone, and while the poor lover who had arranged this party was thinking that Mademoiselle de la Vallière would be of it; perhaps, at the very moment when he was indulging in the anticipation of this miserable happiness of persecuted lovers, which is to realize by merely gazing at each other all other interdicted pleasures, at that moment, Madame, in the midst of her maids of honor, was saying:

"I shall not require the attendance of more than two of the young ladies this evening, Mademoiselle de Tonnay Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais."

La Vallière had foreseen this blow and consequently was prepared for it; but persecution had strengthened her mind; she did not allow Madame the satisfaction of seeing imprinted on her face the painful feelings which at that moment writhed her heart.

On the contrary she smiled with that ineffable sweetness which gave such an angelic character to her countenance, and said:

"Then, madam, I have the whole evening to myself?"

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"I will take advantage of it to get on with the embroidery which your highness was pleased to remark, and which I had before commencing it, the honor to offer to you."

And after saying this, she made a respectful obeisance and withdrew.

Mesdemoiselles de Montalais and de Tonnay Charente did the same.

The news of the promenade issued with them from Madame's room, and was soon spread throughout the palace. Ten minutes afterwards Malicorne knew of Madame's resolution and slipped under Montalais' door a note conceived in the following terms;

"It is necessary that L. V. should pass the night with Madame."

Montalais in conformity with the compact entered into, in the first place burned the paper and then sat down to reflect.

Montalais was a young lady of real

resources, and had soon arranged her plan.

About five o'clock, the hour at which her service required her to be with Madame, she was running across a small grass-plot, and when she came within about ten paces of a group of officers, stumbled and fell gracefully upon one knee, she then rose up again and walked on, but limping.

The gentlemen hastened to her to support her; Montalais had sprained her ankle.

But faithful to her duty, she insisted on going up stairs to Madame's apartment.

"What has happened, and why are you limping in that manner?" inquired the latter; "I thought on hearing you that it was la Vallière."

Montalais then told her how, in running in order to be with her royal highness at the precise moment, she had sprained her foot.

Madame appeared to pity her, and wished to send instantly for a surgeon.

But Montalais assured her that the accident was by no means serious, and added:

"I am only afflicted, madam, at being compelled to fail in my service, and I should have requested la Vallière to have supplied my place near your highness."

Madame frowned.

"But I did not say a word to her on the subject," continued Montalais.

"And why was it that you did not say any thing to her?" inquired Madame.

"Because poor la Vallière appeared so delighted at having her liberty for the evening and the whole night, that I had not the courage to ask her to perform my service."

"How! she is joyful to such a degree as that?" said Madame, struck with these words:

"That is to say, she is almost beside herself. She was singing when I went in—she who is always so melancholy. Besides, your highness knows that she detests society, and that there is a grain of wildness in her character."

"Ho! ho! this wonderful gaiety seems any thing but natural to me," thought Madame.

"She has already made her little preparations," continued Montalais, "to dine in her own room *tête à tête* with one of her most cherished books. But besides, your highness has six other young ladies who would be but too

happy to accompany her, and therefore I did not make any proposal to Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

Madame did not reply.

"Have I acted rightly?" pursued de Montalais, with a slight sinking of the heart at finding that her *ruse de guerre* had succeeded so ill, and upon which she had so completely relied that she had not thought it necessary to imagine a better.

"Does Madame approve what I have done?"

Madame was thinking that during the night the king could very easily slip away from Saint Germain, and as the distance from Saint Germain to Paris was only four leagues and a half, it would not take him more than an hour to return to Paris.

"Tell me," said she, "when la Vallière heard of your accident, did she not at least propose to keep you company?"

"Oh! she does not yet know of my accident, but did she know it I would certainly not ask her to do any thing that would disturb her projects. She seemed enchanted at the idea of passing a whole night alone."

Madame was convinced that some amorous mystery was concealed beneath this thirst for solitude. This mystery must be the nocturnal return of Louis. There could no longer be a doubt upon the subject; la Vallière was forewarned of this return; hence her joy at remaining in the Palais Royal.

It was a plan which had been combined beforehand.

"I will not be their dupe," said Madame, to herself, and she decided at once on the course she would adopt.

"Mademoiselle de Montalais," said she, "be pleased to inform your friend Mademoiselle de la Vallière, that it afflicts me much to disturb her projects of solitude, but instead of wearying herself alone in her own room as she had intended, she must weary herself by accompanying us to Saint Germain."

"Ah! poor la Vallière!" cried Montalais, in a doleful tone, but her heart glowing with joy, "oh! madam, would it not be possible for your highness—"

"Enough," said Madame, "I will have it so. I prefer the company of Mademoiselle La Beaume Le Blanc de la Vallière to the company of any other person. Go, and send her to me, and take good care of your foot."

Montalais did not wait to hear the order repeated. She returned to her own room, wrote an answer to Malicorne, and slipped it under the carpet.

"SHE GOES," was this reply.

A Spartan could not have written more laconically.

"In this way," thought Madame, "while upon the road I shall constantly be watching her, at night she will sleep by my side, and very cunning will his majesty be if he can manage to exchange a single word with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

La Vallière received the order to accompany Madame with the same mild indifference with which she had received the order to remain.

But internally she felt the most lively joy, and she looked upon this change of resolution of the princess as a consolation which Providence had granted her.

Less penetrating than Madame, she attributed all that had happened to mere chance.

While all the court, with the exception of those who were in disgrace, or sick, or who had been unfortunate enough to sprain their ankles were travelling towards Saint Germain, Malicorne brought his workman in M. de Saint Aignan's carriage into the Palais Royal, and took him into the room under that of la Vallière.

This man at once set to work, allured by the splendid recompense which had been promised to him.

As the most excellent tools, those used by the engineers attached to the king's household had been selected for the purpose, among others a saw whose invincible teeth would have cut through oaken beams, hard as iron, even under water, the work advanced rapidly, and a large square piece of the ceiling, taken from between two joists, was received by the united arms of Saint Aignan, Malicorne, the workman, and a confidential valet, a personage sent into the world to see every thing, hear every thing, and repeat nothing.

But in consequence of a new plan which Malicorne had suggested, the opening was made in a corner of the room.

And this was the reason for it.

As there was no dressing-room attached to la Vallière's chamber, she had requested that very morning that she might be allowed to have a large screen, which would supply the place of a dressing-room.

The screen had been granted to her.

It was fully large enough to hide the opening, which, moreover, would be concealed by all the artifices of the joiner's science.

The hole once made, the workman raised himself between the joists and thus obtained entrance into la Vallière's room.

Then he arranged the trap-door, making it fit so exactly that the most experienced eye would not have been able to discern the opening; there appeared no break in the continuity of the lines more than those usual in an inlaid floor.

Malicorne had foreseen every thing; a handle and two admirably wrought hinges which he had purchased were placed upon this leaf of wood.

One of those small winding staircases, which had only been lately invented, to communicate between the ground-floor and the *entre-sol*, the industrious Malicorne had also bought. It cost two thousand livres.

The staircase was higher than was necessary, but the joiner threw aside two of the steps, and it then fitted exactly. This was easily done, as in order to bring it into the palace in Saint Aignan's carriage the better to conceal it it had been taken to pieces.

The staircase destined to receive so illustrious a weight was fastened to the wall by only two cramp-irons.

As to its base it was affixed to the floor of the count's room by two strong screws with hooks; the king and his whole council might have ascended or descended this staircase without fear of accident.

Every hammer struck upon a small cushion of tow, every file had its handle wrapped up in wool, which was saturated with oil.

Moreover, the most noisy part of the work had been executed during the night and early in the morning—that is to say in the absence of la Vallière and of Madame.

When at about two o'clock the court returned to the Palais Royal, la Vallière went up to her room. Every thing was in its place, not the least particle of saw-dust, not the smallest chip was there to apprise her of this violation of her apartment.

But poor Saint Aignan, who had wished to give every assistance in his power to accelerate the work, had torn his hands and his shirt, and expended

much perspiration in the service of his king.

The palms of his hands were completely covered with blisters.

These blisters were occasioned by his holding the ladder for Malicorne while he was assisting the joiner.

And moreover, by his having transported from one room to the other the few pieces of the staircase, consisting of two steps each.

In short, we may venture to assert that had the king seen him so ardently at work he would have sworn to be eternally grateful to him.

As Malicorne, the man of correct calculation, had foreseen, the joiner had completed the whole operation in twenty-four hours.

He received twenty-four louis for his pains and left the palace transported with joy; it was as much as he usually earned in six months.

No one had the slightest suspicion of what had been going on under the apartment of Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

But the night of the second day, and a moment after la Vallière had returned to her own room from Madame's evening party, she heard a slight crackling noise at the farther end of the room.

Astounded, she looked towards the place whence the noise proceeded. The noise recommenced.

"Who is there?" she asked, with a slight accent of terror.

"Tis I," replied the well known voice of the king.

"You! you!" exclaimed the young girl, who for an instant believed she was under the influence of a dream. "But where?—you, sire—you!"

"Here," replied the king, folding back one of the leaves of the screen, and appearing as a ghost at the end of the room,

La Vallière uttered a faint cry, and fell trembling into an arm-chair.

The king advanced respectfully towards her.

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE APPARITION.

LA VALLIÈRE soon recovered from her surprise; the king, by dint of being respectful, restored by his presence more confidence than she had been deprived of by his sudden appearance

But as he perceived that it was, above all, the manner in which he had entered her apartment that most agitated la Vallière, he explained to her the whole mystery of the staircase concealed by the screen, and disavowing altogether his being a supernatural apparition.

"Oh! sire," said la Vallière to him, shaking her head with a charming smile, "present or absent you always appear to my mind at one moment as at another."

"And this means to say, Louise—?"

"Oh! that which you well know, sire: that there is not a single moment during which the poor girl, whose secret you discovered at Fontainebleau, and whom you afterwards dragged from the foot of the cross, does not think of you."

"Louise, you overwhelm me with joy and happiness."

La Vallière smiled sorrowfully and continued:

"But, sire, have you reflected that your ingenious invention cannot be of the least use to us?"

"And why so? Speak, I am waiting—"

"Because the room in which I live is not secure for secrets—far from it. Madame might even, perchance, come here; and my companions run into my room at every hour in the day; to lock my door would be to betray myself as plainly as if I were to write upon it 'Do not come in—the king is here;' and think, sire, that even at this moment there is nothing to prevent that door from opening and your majesty being seen with me."

"It would be then," said the king, laughing, "that I should really be taken for a ghost; for no one can tell in what manner I came here, and only ghosts can pass through walls or floors."

"Oh! sire, what an adventure! pray consider it seriously—what dreadful scandal it would cause—nothing equal to it has ever been said against maids of honor, poor creatures, whom wicked tongues have nevertheless not spared."

"And from all this, my dear Louise, you conclude—? Come now—speak—explain yourself."

"That it is necessary—forgive me for it is a very cruel word to utter—"

Louise smiled.

"Come, let us hear your conclusion," said he.

"It is necessary that your majesty should at once do away with the stair-

case, machinery, and all contrivances; for, reflect, sire, that the evil of being surprised here would be greater than the happiness we enjoy in meeting."

"Well, then, dear Louise," replied the king tenderly, "instead of doing away with this staircase by which I ascend, there is a much more simple method, and one you have not thought of."

"A method—another method still—"

"Yes, still another. Oh! you do not love me so ardently as I do you, since I am more inventive than you are."

She looked at the king inquiringly; he held out his hand to her, which she gently pressed.

"You say," continued the king, "that I run the risk of being discovered by coming to this room, which every one can enter at their pleasure?"

"Oh! yes, sire, and even while you are speaking of it, I am trembling with affright."

"It may be so; but you would not be discovered were you to go down into the rooms beneath this."

"Sire! sire! what are you saying?" cried la Vallière with alarm.

"You misunderstand me, Louise; since at the first word I utter you appear so angry. In the first place do you know to whom those two rooms belong?"

"Why, certainly; to the Count de Guiche."

"No, indeed; but to the Count de Saint Aignan."

"Really!" exclaimed la Vallière.

And this word, which had escaped the joyful heart of the young girl, shot to the bounding heart of the young king as a ray of happy omen.

"Yes, to Saint Aignan, to our friend," said he.

"But, sire," rejoined la Vallière, "I can no more go into M. de Saint Aignan's than I could have gone into the rooms of the Count de Guiche."

"And for what reason can you not do so, Louise?"

"Impossible! impossible!"

"It appears to me, Louise, that under the safeguard of the king, one may do all."

"Under the safeguard of the king!" she repeated, with a look beaming with love.

"Oh! you have confidence in my word, have you not?"

"I have confidence in it when you are not present, sire; but when you

“speak to me, when I see you, I no longer have confidence in any thing.”

“And what do you require to restore your confidence, good Heaven!”

“It is I know not very respectful thus to doubt the king; but to me you are not the king.”

“Ah! Heaven be praised, I hope I am not. You see how I am endeavoring to reassure you. Listen to me, would the presence of a third person give you more confidence?”

“The presence of M. de Saint Aignan—yes.”

“In good truth, Louise, you break my heart with such suspicions.”

“La Vallière did not reply: she merely looked at Louis with that fixed, clear gaze, which penetrates to the recesses of the heart, and said to herself:

“Alas! alas! it is not you that I mistrust; it is not you of whom I am suspicious.”

“I accept the condition,” said the king, sighing. “And Saint Aignan, who has the happy privilege of giving you confidence, shall always be present at our interviews—this I promise you.”

“In earnest truth, sire?”

“On the honor of a gentleman. And you on your side—”

“Wait a moment—that is not all.”

“What! something more still, Louise?”

“Oh! most assuredly—do not be so soon tired; for we are not yet at the end, sire.”

“Well then, conclude my heart-strings as you will.”

“You will readily understand, sire, that these interviews ought, in the eyes of M. de Saint Aignan, to have some species of reasonable motive.”

“Reasonable motive!” cried the king, in a tone of mild reproach.

“Undoubtedly—only reflect, sire.”

“Oh! you possess every feeling of delicacy; and, believe me, my only desire is to equal you in this respect. Well then, Louise, all shall be arranged as you desire. Our interviews shall have a reasonable object; and I have already imagined one that will be so.”

“So that, sire,” said la Vallière, smiling.

“That from to-morrow, if you please—”

“To-morrow!”

“Can you mean to imply that to-morrow is too long a delay?” cried the king, pressing between both his the burning hand of la Vallière.

At this moment steps were heard in the corridor.

“Sire! sire!” exclaimed la Vallière, “some one approaches, some one is coming here. Do you not hear? Fly, sire, fly, I entreat you.”

The king made but one spring from his chair to the screen.

And it was time he did so, for as the king drew one of the folds of the screen round him, the handle of the door turned, and Montalais appeared upon the threshold.

It is not necessary to say that she came in quite naturally, and without ceremony.

She well knew, the cunning one, that to have discreetly knocked at that door instead of opening it at once, would have been evincing a mistrust that would have been disobliging to la Vallière.

She therefore went in unaffectedly, and after casting a rapid glance round the room, which discovered to her two chairs placed very near each other, she employed so much time in closing the door, which from some unknown cause appeared particularly rebellious on this occasion, that the king had sufficient time to raise the trap, and descend the stairs to Saint Aignan’s apartment.

A noise which would have been imperceptible to ears less sharp than hers, assured Montalais of the disappearance of the king; she then succeeded in shutting the stubborn door, and approached la Vallière.

“Let us converse, Louise,” said she, “and seriously, if you have no objection.”

Louise was still much agitated, and did not hear without considerable emotion the word *seriously*, upon which Montalais had designedly laid much stress.

“Good heaven! my dear Aure,” murmured she, “what has happened now?”

“Why, only this, my dear friend, that Madame suspects all.”

“Suspects what?”

“Is there any necessity for explaining further, and do you not at once comprehend me? Come now, you cannot but have observed how friendly she was towards you, then dismissed you, then took you back again.”

“It was, in fact, very strange: but I am accustomed to her eccentricities.”

“Wait a little; you remarked that yesterday, after excluding you from the intended excursion, she ordered you to accompany her.”

"Yes, I undoubtedly remarked it."

"Well, then, it appears that Madame has now obtained sufficient information, for she went straight to the point, having nothing further in France that she could oppose to the torrent that carries every thing before it—you know what I mean by the torrent."

La Vallière hid her face between her hands.

"I mean by that," piteously continued Montalais, "the torrent which broke open the doors of the Carmelites at Chaillot, and which has broken through the prejudices of the court as well at Fontainebleau as at Paris."

"Alas! alas!" murmured la Vallière, her face still concealed, but tears trickling through her fingers.

"Oh! do not afflict yourself thus terribly, for you have not heard half the painful news I have to communicate."

"Gracious heaven!" anxiously exclaimed the young girl, "what can there be more?"

"Well, these are the plain facts. Madame, deprived of any auxiliary in France, for she has successively worn out the two queens, Monsieur, and the whole court, Madame remembered there was a certain person who has some pretended rights—"

La Vallière became white as a marble statue.

"That person," continued Montalais, "is not at Paris at this moment."

"Oh! God!" murmured Louise.

"That person, if I am not mistaken, is in England."

"Yes, yes," sighed la Vallière, almost heart broken.

"Is it not at the court of King Charles II. that the person I am speaking of is now to be found? Tell me."

"Yes."

"Well, this evening a letter was despatched from Madame's cabinet to Saint James', with orders to the courier to go at once to Hampton Court, should the king be there, it being a royal palace about sixteen miles from London."

"That I know—but what more?"

"Now, as Madame writes regularly to London every fortnight, and the usual courier having been despatched only three days ago, I thought that it could only be some very serious circumstance that could have induced her to take up her pen again so soon. Madame, you know, is rather indolent as to writing."

"Oh! yes."

"There is something whispers to me that this letter was written on your account."

"On my account?" repeated the unhappy young girl, with the docility of an automaton.

"And I, who saw this letter before it was sealed, I thought that I read it—"

"You thought you read in it—"

"But I may, perhaps, have been mistaken."

"What was it? come, tell me."

"The name of Bragelonne."

La Vallière jumped up from her chair a prey to the most violent agitation.

"Montalais," said she, sobbing, "all the dreams of youth and innocence have already flown far from me. I have no longer any thing to conceal either from you or any one. My life is now exposed to general view, and is as an open book which may be read by all the world, from the king down to all the passers by. Aure, my dear Aure, what can be done? what is to become of me?"

Montalais drew nearer to her.

"Really," said she, "that depends on your own feelings."

"Well, then, I do not love M. de Bragelonne. When I say that I do not love him, understand me. I love him only with the tenderness with which I could have loved a good brother; but that is not the love which he demands; it is not that I promised him."

"In short, you love the king," said Montalais, "and that is a tolerably good excuse."

"Yes, I do love the king," murmured the young girl in a hollow tone, "and I have dearly enough paid the right of uttering these words. Come, now, speak to me, what can you do, either for me or against me, in the position in which I now find myself?"

"Speak to me more clearly."

"What would you have me say to you?"

"Then you have nothing more particular to say to me?"

No," replied Louise, somewhat astonished.

"Then it is merely my advice you ask?"

"Yes."

"Regarding Monsieur Raoul."

"Nothing more."

"It is a delicate matter," replied Montalais.

"No: there is nothing delicate in it. Must I marry him in order to keep the promise that I gave? Must I continue to listen to the king?"

"Do you know that you are placing me in a very difficult position?" said Montalais, smiling. "You ask me if you ought to marry Raoul, whose friend I am, and whose mortal displeasure I should incur were I to counsel you against him. You speak to me afterwards of listening to the king, whose subject I am, and whom I should offend by advising you in a certain way. Ah! Louise! Louise! you look but lightly on a very difficult position."

"You have not understood me, Aure," said la Vallière, wounded at the slightly sarcastic tone which Montalais had assumed. "If I speak of marrying M. de Bragelonne it is because I can marry him without incurring his displeasure. But by the same reason, if I listen to the king ought I to allow him to be the usurper of a right, doubtless but of little value, but to which love gives a certain appearance of value. What I ask, then, is that you should point out an honorable means of disengaging myself, be it from the one or from the other, or rather, I ask you from which I can the most honorably disengage myself?"

"My dear Louise," replied Montalais, after a silence of some seconds, "I am not one of the sages of Greece, and I have no perfectly invariable rules of conduct; but, in lieu of these, I have some experience, and I can only tell you that a woman never asks advice of the nature you are now asking me without being much embarrassed. Now, you have given a solemn promise, you have honorable feeling; if then you are embarrassed from having formed such an engagement, it is not the advice of a stranger—for all are strangers when a heart is overflowing with love—it is not, I say again, my advice which would relieve you from your embarrassment. I will not therefore give it you, and for this reason, that were I in your place I should be more embarrassed after receiving the advice than before. All that I can do is to repeat what I have already said: Is it your wish that I should assist you?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well, then, that is all. Tell me in what you wish me to assist you. Tell me for whom and against whom. In this way we shall commit no blunders."

"But, in the first place, you," said la Vallière, pressing her companion's hand—"for whom, or against whom, do you declare yourself?"

"For you, if you are really my friend."

"Are you not the confidant of Madame?"

"A still weightier reason, for I can be the more useful to you. If I knew nothing on that side I could not assist you, and you would not consequently be able to derive any advantage from my knowledge. Friendship exists but by this species of mutual advantage."

"And the result will be that you would at the same time continue to be the friend of Madame?"

"Evidently. Do you complain of that?"

"No," said la Vallière pensively; for this cynical frankness appeared to her an offence committed towards the woman, and a wrong towards the friend.

"This is as it should be," said Montalais, "for otherwise you would indeed be foolish."

"Then you will serve me?"

"With devotedness; above all if you will serve me in the same manner."

"One would think that you did not know my heart," replied la Vallière, gazing at Montalais with astonished eyes.

"Why, since we have been at court things have so much changed."

"And how so?"

"It is plain enough. Were you when we were down yonder at Blois the second queen of France?"

La Vallière cast down her head and began to weep.

Montalais looked at her with an expression altogether indescribable, and she murmured these words:

"Poor girl!"

Then correcting herself—

"Poor king!" said she.

She kissed Louise on the forehead and retired to her own room, where Malicorne was waiting for her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PORTRAIT.

In that malady which is called *Love*, the attacks follow each other at shorter and shorter intervals as soon as it has declared itself.

After that the attacks become less and less frequent, in proportionate degrees to the approaching cure.

This is laid down as a general axiom, but in this instance in particular, as the heading of a chapter. Let us continue our story.

The next day being the one appointed by the king for the first interview in Saint Aignan's apartment, la Vallière, on putting aside her screen, found on the floor a note written by the king's own hand.

This note had passed from the lower region to the upper one, through the opening in the floor. No indiscreet hand, no curious eyes could have obtained access through the small aperture which had served to admit this little note.

This was one of Malicorne's ideas. Seeing how useful Saint Aignan was about to become to the king by means of his lodgings, he did not wish that the courtier should also become indispensable. He had of his own private authority reserved that post for himself.

La Vallière eagerly read the note, which appointed two o'clock in the afternoon as the time for meeting, and which pointed out to her the way in which she could raise the trap door.

"Dress yourself handsomely," added the *postscriptum* to the letter.

These last words astonished the young girl, but they at the same time gave her more confidence.

The hours dragged slowly on. At last the appointed one arrived.

As punctual as the priestess Hero, Louise raised the trap just as the last stroke of two resounded from the clock, and she found the king waiting upon the staircase, who respectfully offered her his hand.

This delicate deference sensibly affected her.

At the foot of the staircase, the two lovers found the Count de Saint Aignan, who with a smile and a bow, in the best possible taste, offered his thanks to la Vallière for the honor she was conferring on him by visiting his apartment.

Then turning to the king,

"Sire," said he, "our man has come."

La Vallière looked anxiously at Louis.

"Mademoiselle," said the king, "if I have requested you to do me the honor of coming here, it has been from interested motives. I have ordered the

attendance of an excellent painter who has the gift of drawing perfect likenesses, and I am desirous that you should allow him to paint your portrait. Moreover, should you absolutely insist upon it, the picture shall remain in your own room.

La Vallière blushed.

"You see," said the king to her, "we shall not be only three, but four. And, good Heaven! if we are not to be alone, I care not how many persons there be present."

La Vallière gently pressed the tips of her royal lover's fingers.

"If your majesty so pleases, let us go into the next room," said Saint Aignan.

He opened the door and ushered his guests into the room.

The king walked behind La Vallière, and his eyes devoured her pearl-like neck, upon which fell the rich and curling ringlets of the young girl's beautifully fair hair.

La Vallière was attired in a gown of thick pearl-gray silk shot with pink; a jet necklace and ear-rings, advantageously contrasted with the dazzling whiteness of her skin; her tapering and diaphanous fingers held a bouquet of heart's ease, Bengal roses and elemtis, with their finely denticulated foliage, above which rose, as a vase for distributing perfumes, a Harlem tulip, veined gray and violet—a pure and marvellous specimen—which had cost the gardener five years of combination, and five thousand livres to the king.

This bouquet Louis had placed in la Vallière's hand when he first bowed to her.

In the room, of which Saint Aignan had just opened the door, was standing a young man dressed in a light colored velvet suit, with fine black eyes, and long brown hair.

It was the painter. His canvas was already stretched—his palette prepared.

He bowed to Mademoiselle de la Vallière with the grave curiosity of an artist who is studying his model, bowed discreetly to the king, not appearing to recognize him, but merely as he would have saluted any other gentleman.

The young girl seated herself in a graceful and easy attitude, her feet resting upon cushions, and that her look might have nothing vague or affected in it, the painter begged her to fix her eyes on some particular object.

Then Louis XIV., smiling, seated

himself upon the cushions at the feet of his mistress.

She therefore was reclining on the back of her arm-chair, her bouquet in her hand, while the king, with his eyes raised towards her, sat ardently gazing at her, so that they formed a most charming group, which the artist contemplated for several minutes with lively satisfaction, while on his side, Saint Aignan contemplated them with envy.

The painter sketched the outlines rapidly, then with the first stroke of his brush was seen to start forth from the gray back ground that soft and poetical face, with its mild eyes, its rosy cheeks encircled by hair of almost silvery fairness.

The two lovers spoke little, but looked much at each other, and at times their looks became so languishing that the painter was obliged to pause from his labors that he might not represent an Erycina instead of a la Vallière.

It was then that Saint Aignan would come to the rescue; he recited verses, or told some little tale, such as Patru was wont to relate, or as Tallemant des Réaux so beautifully wrote.

Or la Vallière being fatigued from remaining so long in one position, they would for a while discontinue.

Then a large salver of Chinese porcelain, loaded with the choicest fruits that it had been possible to find, then the wine of Xeres distilling its liquid topazes into rich goblets of chased silver, served as accessories to this picture of which the painter was to trace only the most ephemeral form.

The painter was composing remembrances for his old age.

Two hours were thus occupied; but on hearing the clock strike four la Vallière rose and made a sign to the king.

Louis then got up, examined the painting, and addressed some flattering compliments to the artist.

Saint Aignan praised the resemblance, which he asserted was already assured.

La Vallière, in her turn, blushing, thanked the painter, and went into the next room, where the king followed her, after having called to Saint Aignan to accompany him.

"We meet again to-morrow, do we not?" said he to la Vallière.

"But, sire, consider for a moment, that they will come into my room and that they will not find me here."

"Well?"

"And then what would become of me?"

"You are very apprehensive, Louise."

"But supposing for a moment that Madame should send for me?"

"Oh!" replied the king, "will not the day arrive when you yourself will tell me to brave every thing rather than be compelled to leave you?"

"When that day comes, sire, I shall be insane, and you ought not to listen to me."

"Adieu! till to-morrow, Louise."

La Vallière sighed, then not having sufficient strength to oppose the royal request:

"Since you will have it so, sire," she replied, "farewell till to-morrow."

And with these words she lightly ran up the staircase and disappeared from her lover's eyes.

"Well, sirè?" said Saint Aignan, when she was gone.

"Well, Saint Aignan, yesterday I thought myself the happiest of men."

"And does your majesty, perchance, think to-day that you are the most unhappy?"

"No; but this love is an inextinguishable thirst; it is in vain I drink, in vain I greedily swallow the drops of water which your ingenuity has procured for me. The more I drink, the more my thirst increases."

"Sire, this is somewhat your own fault; for it was your majesty who arranged matters in the way they now are."

"You are right."

"Therefore, in such a state of things, sire, the true way of being happy is to believe yourself satisfied, and wait."

"Wait! you know then the full signification of that word—wait?"

"Gently, sire, gently, do not despair in this way. I have already sought some means to satisfy you, and I will still be on the search."

The king shook his head with a despairing air.

"How, sire, are you no longer satisfied with me?"

"Oh! yes, I am, my dear Saint Aignan; but devise some means—"

"Sire, I engage to seek them, but that is all I can do."

The king wished again to see the portrait, as he could no longer see the original. He pointed out some alterations to the painter and left the room.

Immediately he was gone; Saint Aignan dismissed the artist.

The easel, palette, and painter no sooner disappeared than Malicorne popped his head through the opening in the tapestry, which hung before the door.

Saint Aignan received him with open arms, but at the same time with a certain degree of melancholy.

The cloud which had passed over the royal sun in its turn veiled the faithful satellite.

Malicorne at the first glance perceived the shade thus cast upon the countenance of Saint Aignan.

"Oh! my lord count, how gloomily you look!"

"And I have great reason for it, my dear M. Malicorne. Would you believe that the king is discontented?"

"Discontented with his staircase?"

"Oh! no; on the contrary the staircase pleased him much."

"It is then the manner in which the rooms are decorated, that is not to his taste."

"Oh! no; he did not even think of that. No; that which displeased the king—"

"I can spare you the trouble of telling me, count, for I at once divine it: it was to find himself the fourth at a love rendezvous. How, Monsieur de Saint Aignan, did you not guess the reason?"

"How was it possible that I could guess it, my dear Monsieur Malicorne, when I had followed out to the very letter the instructions I had received from the king."

"What! really, did his majesty positively insist on your remaining with him?"

"Positively."

"And his majesty also required the attendance of the painter, whom I met upon the stairs."

"He peremptorily ordered it."

"Then, by Jove! I can very well understand that his majesty was discontented."

"Discontented that his orders should have been punctually obeyed! I really cannot understand you."

Malicorne scratched his ear.

"At what o'clock did the king say that he would be with you?"

"At two o'clock."

"And you were here waiting for the king?"

"Yes, at half-past one."

"Ah! really."

"The deuce! it would have been a

pretty thing indeed not to have been punctual with the king."

Notwithstanding all the respect which he felt for Saint Aignan, Malicorne could not restrain himself from shrugging up his shoulders.

"And this painter," said he, "did the king order him to be in attendance at two o'clock?"

"No; but I had him here by twelve. It is much better, you will confess, that a painter should wait two hours than the king two minutes."

Malicorne laughed, but noiselessly.

"Come now, dear M. Malicorne, laugh less at me, and speak more."

"You insist upon it."

"I entreat you will do so."

"Well, my lord count, if you desire to see the king a little better satisfied the next time he comes—"

"He will be here to-morrow."

"Well, if you wish the king to be a little more contented—"

"*Ventre-Saint-Gris!*" as his grandfather used to say, "if I do wish it—I believe I do indeed!"

"Well then, to-morrow at the instant that the king arrives, have some affair that calls you out—but some affair that is altogether indispensable."

"Oh! oh!"

"For twenty minutes or so."

"Leave the king alone twenty minutes!" exclaimed Saint Aignan with terror.

"Oh! if it be so, consider that I have said nothing," rejoined Malicorne, moving towards the door.

"By no means! by no means, dear Monsieur Malicorne; on the contrary, pray go on, for I begin to comprehend your meaning. And the painter?"

"Oh! the painter—why he must have been unavoidably detained for half an hour."

"Half an hour, you think."

"Yes, I believe it will be better."

"My dear sir, I will do precisely as you advise"

"And I think you will not find it disadvantageous. Will you allow me to call to-morrow to hear how matters have succeeded?"

"Undoubtedly."

"I have the honor to be your very respectful servant, Monsieur de Saint Aignan."

And Malicorne backed out of the room.

"Decidedly that lad has more brains than I have!" exclaimed Saint Aignan, fully impressed with this conviction.

CHAPTER XCIX.

HAMPTON COURT.

THE revelation which la Montalais made to la Vallière, and of which we have given an account in our last chapter, brings us back naturally to the principal hero of this history—a poor chevalier, wandering about at the breath of every caprice of the king.

If our reader will be pleased to follow us we will pass with him over that strait, more stormy than that of Euripas, which separates Calais from Dover, and will traverse that green and beautifully wooded country, with its thousand rivulets, which surrounds Canterbury, Feversham, Sittingbourne and ten other towns and villages, each more picturesque than the other, and will at length arrive with him in London.

Thence, as hounds following a scent, we will, after having ascertained that Raoul had for a while sojourned at Whitehall, then at St. James's Palace—when we shall have been informed that he was received by Monk, and introduced to the first personages in the court of Charles II.—we will hasten after him to one of the summer palaces of the merry monarch, near the town of Kingston upon Thames, called Hampton Court, bathed by the waters of that noble river.

The river is not at that place the proud thoroughfare which bears each day upon its bosom half a million of travellers, and winds its waves, black as the Cocytus, saying, "And I also am the sea!"

No, it is there but a gentle and limpid stream, with its mossy banks, its glassy surface, reflecting weeping willows and majestic elms and beech trees, with here and there a bark, sleeping as it were among the rushes, in a creek, surrounded with withy bushes and myosotis.

The surrounding country is calm and rich; small brick cottages, whose chimneys, with their blue smoke, peer above their thick cuirasses of shining dark-green holly; the children, dressed in their red frocks, appear and disappear in the long grass like poppies bending beneath the influence of the wind.

Immense white sheep ruminate with closed eyes beneath the shade of the stunted aspen trees—and from time to time the king-fisher, with its emerald

and golden hues, whirls like a magic ball over the surface of the shining river, heedlessly grazing the line of his brother fisher, a man, seated in his boat, endeavoring to entrap the swift swimming trout or the voracious pike.

Above this paradise of dark shade and mild, soft light rises the palace of Hampton Court, originally built by Wolsey; a residence which the proud cardinal had made so sumptuous as to render it desirable even to the king, and which he was compelled, like a timid courtier, to present to his master, Henry VIII., who had knit his brows from envy and cupidity on seeing the marvellous magnificence of the structure.

Hampton Court, with its brick walls, its large windows, its majestic iron railings; Hampton Court, with its fantastic turrets, its sequestered walks, and its interior fountains, similar to those of the Alhambra; Hampton Court is a bed of roses, of jessamine and clematis, it is a delight to both sight and smell; it is the most charming frame-work to the picture of love which Charles II. was unrolling amid the voluptuous paintings by Titian, Pordenoni and Vandyke; he who had in his gallery the portrait of Charles I. painted by the latter, and in the wood-work of his palace holes made by the bullets of the Puritans fired by Cromwell's soldiers on the 24th of August, 1648, when they led Charles I. a prisoner to Hampton Court.

It was there that this king, always intoxicated with pleasure, held his court; this king, poetical in his desires; this formerly unhappy prince, who now compensated himself by a day of voluptuousness for every minute he had passed in anguish and in misery.

It was not the soft mossy grass of Hampton Court—so soft that one's feet seem to be treading upon velvet; it was not the square flower-beds which surround the foot of every tree, forming beds of roses twenty feet in circumference, which bloom in the open air; it was not the tall Linden tree, whose branches hang down to the ground like weeping willows, and veil the secrets of love or meditation beneath their shade: it was not all this that Charles II. loved in his beautiful palace of Hampton Court.

Perhaps it was that splendid sheet of water, that immense lake, curling beneath the morning breeze, like to

the undulations of Cleopatra's hair—those waters, surrounded with flowering shrubs, and bearing on their surface masses of water-lilies, with their snow-white petals, contrasting with their golden germ—those mysterious waters, full of soft murmurings, over which sails proudly the majestic swan, and teeming with hundreds of other aquatic birds, from all nations and all climes.

It was perhaps the enormous lilies, with their bicolored foliage, fairy bridges thrown over rivulets and canals; the deer which brouze in the interminable avenues, and countless birds that enchant the air with their sweet warblings and delight the eye with their varied plumage.

For there is all this at Hampton Court: there are besides white roses trained along high trellices, which they climb up and shower upon the ground beneath them their odoriferous snow. In the first park stand hundreds of stately sycamores, with their green trunks, which bathe their feet in a luxuriant and poetic moisture.

No, what Charles II. most valued at Hampton Court, were those charming forms, which, in the afternoon, flitted along the terrace, when, like Louis XIV., he had their beauties traced in his great cabinet by the skilful pencils of the best painters of his time—pencils which had the art to fix upon the canvass a ray escaped from those most beautiful eyes, which darted love with every glance.

The day on which we arrive at Hampton Court the sky is almost as soft and clear as is the sky in France; the air has a balmy humidity, the geraniums, seringas and heliotropes growing by millions in the flower-beds, exhale their intoxicating perfumes.

It is one o'clock. The king, who had returned from the chase, had paid a visit to Lady Castelmaine, then his titular mistress; that after giving this proof of fidelity, he might allow himself all sorts of infidelity until the evening.

The whole court is full of joy and love. It is the time when ladies seriously ask the gentlemen their opinion as to whether such and such a foot is more or less pretty when encased in a rose-colored or green silk stocking.

It is the time when Charles II. declares that there is no hope for any woman who does not wear a green silk stocking, because it has pleased Miss

Lucy Stewart to wear stockings of that particular color.

While the king is endeavoring to communicate his preferences, we shall see in the beech tree walk facing the terrace, a young lady in a dark dress walking beside another in a lilac-colored dress striped with dark blue.

They crossed the grass-plot, in the centre of which rises a beautiful fountain ornamented by bronze syrens, and went on conversing together to the terrace, along which were built several summer houses of varied form; but as these cabinets were mostly occupied, these young ladies passed on; the one was blushing, the other meditating.

They at length reached the end of this terrace, which commands a full view of the Thames, and finding a cool shelter, seated themselves side by side.

"Where are we going, Stewart?" said the younger of the two ladies to her companion.

"We are going, my dear Grafton, where you are leading us."

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you undoubtedly: to the farther end of the palace; to that bench on which the young Frenchman waits and sighs."

Miss Mary Grafton stopped at once."

"No, no," said she; "I will not go there."

"And why not?"

"Let us return, Stewart."

"On the contrary let us go on, and have an explanation."

"Upon what?"

"To know why it is that the Viscount de Bragelonne is always the companion of your walks."

"And from this you conclude that he loves me, or that I love him."

"And why not? he is a charming young man. But no one can hear me I hope"—said Miss Lucy Stewart, looking around her with a smile, which indicated that her uneasiness was not very great.

"No, no," replied Mary; "the king is in his oval cabinet with the Duke of Buckingham."

"By-the-by, with regard to the duke, Mary—"

"What?"

"It appeared to me that he had declared himself your knight since his return from France. How is your heart affected with regard to him?"

Mary Grafton merely shrugged her shoulders.

"Well! well! I will ask that of

the handsome Bragelonne," said Miss Stewart, laughing. "Come, come, let us go to him instantly."

"And for what purpose?"

"I have something to say to him."

"Not yet. Let me say a word to you first. Come now, Stewart, you who know all the king's little secrets—"

"And you believe that?"

"Why really you ought to know them, or else no one does. Tell me, now, what is the reason that Monsieur de Bragelonne is in England, and what does he here?"

"What every gentleman does who is sent by a king to another king."

"Be it so; but seriously, although politics is not our forte, we know enough of them to be assured that Monsieur de Bragelonne has no serious mission."

"Listen to me," said Miss Stewart, with affected gravity, "I will in your behalf betray a great state secret. Would you like me to recite the credential letter given by the King, Louis XIV. to Monsieur de Bragelonne, and addressed to his majesty King Charles II.?"

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"Well then, these are its contents: 'My brother, I send to you a gentleman of my court, the son of a person whom you love. Treat him well, I beg of you, and induce him to like England.'"

"Did it say that?"

"Plainly—or something equivalent to it. I will not answer for the precise words, but that was the sense of them."

"Well, and what did you deduce from this—or rather, what did the king deduce from it?"

"That his majesty the French king had his reasons for sending Monsieur de Bragelonne to a distance, and for getting him married any where else but in France."

"So that in conformity with that letter—"

"King Charles II. received M. de Bragelonne as you have seen, splendidly, and in the most friendly manner: he gave him the handsomest apartment in Whitehall; and, as you are the most precious personage of his court, seeing that you had refused the offer of his heart—nay, do not blush—he wished to inspire you with a liking for this gallant Frenchman, and to make him this handsome gift. And this is why you, the heiress of three hundred thousand pounds; you, who will be a dutchess; you, beautiful and

good, have been invited to every party to which the Viscount de Bragelonne was invited. In short, it was a plot, a species of conspiracy, a complete train. Now, see whether you will fire it, I have given you the match."

Miss Grafton smiled with that charming expression which was habitual to her, and pressing the hand of her companion:

"Thank the king for me," said she.

"Yes, yes, but the Duke of Buckingham is jealous," replied Miss Lucy. "Take care!"

These words were scarcely uttered when the Duke of Buckingham came out of one of the pavilions of the terrace, and approaching the young ladies with a smile:

"You are mistaken, Miss Stewart," said he, "I am not jealous; and in proof of it, Miss Mary, yonder is the person of whom I should be jealous, the Viscount de Bragelonne, and he is there alone. Poor youth! Permit me then to abandon to him for a few minutes your most delightful company, seeing that during those few minutes it is necessary that I should converse with Miss Lucy Stewart."

Then bowing to Miss Stewart—

"Will you do me the honor to take my hand, that I may conduct you to the king, who is waiting for us?"

And with these words, Buckingham, who still continued laughing, took Miss Stewart's hand and led her away.

When Mary Grafton was thus left alone, she remained standing, with her head leaning on one shoulder, with that graceful softness peculiar to young English ladies. For a few moments she was motionless, with her eyes fixed on Raoul, but seemed undecided as to the course she ought to pursue. At length, after her cheeks, which became alternately pale and red, had revealed the struggle which had been agitating her heart, she appeared to have formed a determination, and advanced with a tolerably firm step towards the bench on which Raoul was sitting, lost in thought, as Buckingham had said.

The noise of Miss Grafton's steps, slight as it was upon the mossy grass-plot, roused Raoul; he looked round, perceived the young girl, and advanced to meet the companion whom his happy fate thus brought to him.

"I am sent to you, sir," said Mary Grafton, "will you accept my company?"

"And to whom ought I to be grate-

ful for such happiness?" inquired Raoul.

"To the Duke of Buckingham," replied Mary, affecting a lively air.

"To the Duke of Buckingham!" exclaimed Raoul, "he who so passionately seeks your society. Can I believe my ears, Miss Grafton?"

"In fact you must perceive, sir, that every thing conspires to order matters so that we should pass the best, or I should rather say, the greater part of the day together. Yesterday it was the king who ordered me to seat you next to me at table; to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham who requests me to come here and sit down on that bench beside you."

"And he went away in order to leave the field to me?" asked Raoul, somewhat confused.

"Look yonder at the farther end of the walk; see he is now just disappearing with Miss Stewart. Are they as complaisant as this in France, viscount?"

"Mademoiselle, I cannot precisely say what they do in France, for I can scarcely call myself a Frenchman. I have lived in many countries, and almost always as a soldier; and then I have spent much of my time in the country. I am a complete savage."

"You do not feel quite at home in England, do you?" inquired Miss Grafton.

"I really do not know," absently said Raoul, sighing.

"How! you do not know?"

"I beg your pardon," said Raoul, shaking his head, as if to rouse himself, and to collect his wandering thoughts—your pardon—"I heard not what you said."

"Oh!" said the young lady, also sighing, "how wrong it was of the Duke of Buckingham to send me here."

"Wrong!" cried Raoul eagerly; "yes, you are right, my society is very stupid, and must be wearisome to you. The Duke of Buckingham was wrong in sending you here."

"It is precisely," replied the young lady, with her grave and vibrating voice, "it is precisely because you do not weary me that the duke was wrong in requesting me to come to you."

Raoul blushed deeply.

"But how happens it that you consented to come here. The Duke of Buckingham loves you and you love him?"

"No," replied Mary very seriously,

no; the Duke of Buckingham cannot love me since he loves the Duke of Orleans; and as to myself I feel no love for the duke."

Raoul raised his astonished eyes to the young girl's face.

"Are you a friend of the Duke of Buckingham, viscount?" she continued.

"The duke does me the honor to call me his friend, since we met in France."

"You are then merely chance acquaintances?"

"No, for the Duke of Buckingham is the very intimate friend of a gentleman whom I love as a brother."

"Of the Count de Guiche?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Who loves the Duchess of Orleans?"

"Oh! what is that you are saying?"

"And who is beloved by her?" tranquilly continued Miss Grafton.

Raoul cast down his head; Miss Grafton continued, sighing:

"They are very fortunate. Come now, you had better leave me, Monsieur de Bragelonne, for the Duke of Buckingham has imposed a disagreeable commission upon you by offering me to you as the companion of your walk. Your heart is elsewhere, and it is with difficulty that you grant me even the charity of your mind. Confess it—confess it at once: it would be wrong in you, viscount, not to acknowledge it."

"Madam, I do acknowledge it."

She looked intently at him.

He was so ingenuous and so handsome, his eye was so limpid and so full of mild frankness and resolution, that no woman, particularly one possessing the distinguished talents of Miss Grafton, could for a moment imagine him to be either discourteous or a simpleton.

She saw only that he loved another woman, and with all the sincerity of his heart.

"Yes, I understand," she said, "you are in love, and in France."

Raoul bowed.

"Does the duke know of your love?"

"No one knows it," replied Raoul.

"And why then do you acknowledge it to me?"

"Mademoiselle—"

"Come now, speak on—"

"I cannot."

"Then it is for me to explain the matter for you; you will not say any thing more because you are now convinced

that I do not love the duke; because you believe that I might, perhaps, have loved you: because you are a gentleman of noble heart and great delicacy; and instead of taking, were it only for a moment, a hand which has, as it were, been placed in yours; instead of smiling on one who would have smiled on you; you have preferred—you who are young—saying to me, who am not ill-looking—"My heart is still in France." Well, Monsieur de Bragelonne, I thank you, you are a generous, high-minded gentleman. I love you still more for this: that is to say, as a friend. But now let us say no more of me, but let us speak of you. Forget that Mary Grafton has ever spoken to you of herself. Tell me, why is it that you are so melancholy? Why is it that you have become more so within the last few days?"

Raoul was moved even to his heart's core by the sweet and mournful accents of that voice; he could not find even a word to reply to her; the young girl came once more to his aid.

"Pity me!" she said, "my mother was a Frenchwoman, I may, therefore, say that I am by blood and soul a Frenchwoman, but above this my ardent feelings, hover incessantly the fogs and gloominess of England. Pardon, I had golden dreams of magical felicity, but then comes this damp haze enveloping my dream and extinguishing it. Again pardon me, enough of this subject; give me your hand and relate your sorrows to a friend."

"You are a Frenchwoman, you have said, a Frenchwoman in blood and soul."

"Yes, I repeat, that not only was my mother a Frenchwoman, but as my father, a friend of Charles the First, had exiled himself and lived in France during the rule of the Protector, I was brought up in Paris. Upon the restoration of Charles II. my father returned to England, but to die there almost immediately. My poor father! Then it was that the king raised me to the rank of duchess, and completed my dowry."

"Have you still relations in France?" asked Raoul with deep interest.

"I have a sister who is my elder by seven or eight years, who married in France and is already a widow; her name is Madame de Bellière."

Raoul made a gesture of surprise.

"You perhaps know her?"

"I have heard her name mentioned."

"She also loves, and her last letters tell me that she is happy, therefore, she must be loved in return. I have half her soul, Monsieur de Bragelonne, but I have not half her happiness. But let us speak of you. Who is it that you love in France?"

"A young person who is as sweet and white as a lily."

"But if she loves you, why are you so sorrowful?"

"I have been told that she no longer loves me."

"But I should hope that you do not believe it?"

"The person who wrote to me did not sign his letter."

"An anonymous denunciation! Oh! there is treachery in that," cried Miss Grafton.

"See this," said Raoul taking out a note which he had read a hundred times.

Mary Grafton took the note and read.

"VISCOUNT," said this letter, "you are perfectly right in amusing yourself across the channel with Charles II. and his beautiful ladies, for at the court of Louis XIV, they are besieging you in the castle of your love. Remain, therefore, forever in London, poor Viscount, or return quickly to Paris."

"No signature," said Miss Grafton.

"No."

"Then do not believe a word of it."

"I will not, but here is a second letter."

"From whom?"

"The Count de Guiche."

"Oh! that is quite another matter, and this letter tells you?"

"Read."

"My friend, I am wounded. Return, Raoul, return!"

GUICHE."

"And what do you intend doing?" inquired the young girl with a sinking heart.

"My intention on receiving this letter was on the instant to have taken leave of the king."

"And you received it?"

"The day before yesterday."

"It is dated from Fontainebleau."

"It is strange is it not? The Count is at Paris. In short, I should have set off at once, but when I spoke to the king of my departure, he began to laugh and said: "My good ambassa-

dor how happens it that you are going, has your master recalled you?" I blushed, I was quite out of countenance, for in fact the king sent me here, and I have not received any order to return."

Mary pensively knit her brows.

"And you will remain?" she asked.

"I cannot do otherwise, Mademoiselle."

"And she whom you love?"

"Well?"

"Does she write to you?"

"Never."

"Never! Oh! then she does not love you."

"At least she has not written to me since my departure."

"Did she write to you before that?"

"Sometimes. Oh! I trust that this has happened from some hindrance, some untoward accident."

"Silence! Here comes the duke."

And in fact Buckingham was advancing towards them with smiles upon his lips, from the farther end of the walk; he was walking slowly, and when he got near them, held out his hands to the two friends.

"Have you come to an understanding?" said he.

"Upon what?" inquired Mary Grafton.

"Upon that which would make you happy, dear Mary, and render Raoul less unhappy than he is."

"I do not understand your Grace," said Raoul.

"This is my feeling on the subject, Miss Grafton, shall I speak further before the Viscount?"

And he smiled.

"If you mean to say," proudly replied the young girl, "that I was disposed to love M. de Bragelonne, it would be useless, for I have told him so."

Buckingham reflected, but without being in the slightest degree agitated by this avowal, as she had expected he would be.

"It is," said he, "because I know you to possess a mind of superior delicacy, and above all, a loyal soul, that I left you with the Viscount de Bragelonne, whose wounded heart can be cured only when in the hands of such a physician as yourself."

"But, my lord, before speaking to me of the heart of M. de Bragelonne, you spoke to me of your own. Would you, then, have me cure two hearts at one and the same time?"

"That is true, Miss Grafton; but

you will do me the justice to acknowledge that I soon abandoned an useless pursuit, foreseeing that my wound was incurable."

Mary reflected for a moment.

"My lord," said she, "the Viscount de Bragelonne is happy. He loves and he is loved. He, therefore, does not require such a physician as myself."

"The Viscount de Bragelonne," replied Buckingham, "is about to suffer from a serious malady, and it is more than ever necessary that his heart should be well attended to."

"Explain yourself at once my lord," eagerly cried Raoul.

"No, by degrees I will explain myself, but, if you desire it, I will tell Miss Grafton that which you may not hear."

"My lord, you are putting me to the torture; my lord, you know something."

"I know that Mary Grafton is the most charming object that a suffering heart could meet with in its path."

"My Lord, I have already told you that the Viscount de Bragelonne loves elsewhere," cried the young girl.

"And he is wrong."

"You know it then, my lord duke, you know then that I am wrong?"

"Yes."

"But who then is it that he loves?" cried the young girl.

"He loves a woman who is unworthy of him," tranquilly replied Buckingham, with that phlegmatic manner which only an Englishman could find in either his head or his heart.

Mary Grafton uttered a shriek which, not less than the words of Buckingham, called to the cheeks of Bragelonne, all the pallidness of a swoon and the shuddering of terror.

"Duke!" he exclaimed, "you have just uttered such words, that without losing another second I will proceed to Paris to seek an explanation of them."

"You will remain here," said Buckingham.

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you."

"And how so?"

"Because you have not the right to absent yourself, and because a man does not abandon the service of a king for that of any woman, were she as worthy of being loved as Mary Grafton is."

"Then tell me what you know"

"I will do so willingly. But will you remain?"

"Yes, if you speak frankly to me."

They were thus speaking, and undoubtedly Buckingham would have told, not every thing that had really happened, but every thing that he knew, when one of the king's footmen appeared at the end of the terrace, and advanced towards the cabinet in which were the king and Miss Lucy Stewart.

This man preceded a courier covered with dust, and who appeared to have but that moment alighted from his horse.

"A courier from France! a courier from Madame!" exclaimed Raoul at once recognising madame's livery.

The servant and the courier sent in to acquaint the king, while the Duke of Buckingham and Miss Grafton exchanged a look of compassionating sympathy for poor Raoul.

CHAPTER C.

MADAME'S COURIER.

CHARLES II. was proving or endeavoring to prove to Miss Stewart that he thought only of her, and consequently promised to love her with as fervent a passion as that of his grandfather, Henry IV. for Gabrielle.

Unhappily for Charles II. he had fallen on an unlucky day, a day on which Miss Stewart had taken it into her head to excite his jealousy.

And, therefore, on hearing the king's pompous promise, instead of being affected by it, as Charles II. had expected, she burst into a loud laugh.

"Oh! sire, sire," cried she laughing all the while, "if I had the misfortune to ask you for a proof of this unbounded love, how easily could I discover that you have been saying that which is untrue."

"Listen to me," said Charles II. "you have seen my magnificent cartoons, by Raphael, you know how much I prize them. The whole world envies me their possession. My father sent Vandyrke to purchase them. Would you that I should this very day send them to your apartment."

"Oh! no," replied Miss Stewart, "beware not to do any thing of the kind. I am too narrowly lodged to receive such guests as those."

"Then I will give you Hampton Court to place the cartoons in."

"Be less generous, sire, and love longer than you do, and that is all that I will ask of you."

"I will always love you; will not that suffice?"

"You are laughing, sire."

"What would you have me do, would you have me weep?"

"No, but I should like to see you somewhat more melancholy."

"Thank heaven, my lovely one, I was so long enough; fourteen years of exile, of poverty, of misery; it appears to me that I have paid my debts in that way; and besides melancholy makes one look so ugly."

"By no means, and, as a proof, look at the young Frenchman."

"Oh! the Viscount de Bragelonne! what you also! Confound me, but they will all go mad for him, one after the other; besides he has good reason to be melancholy."

"And why so?"

"Oh! yes, indeed, I must reveal even state secrets to you?"

"Should I desire it, you must do so, for did you not swear to me just now that you were ready to do all that I might ask."

"Well, then, he is longing to return to his own country. There, are you satisfied?"

"Longing?"

"Yes; a proof that he is a simpleton."

"How? a simpleton?"

"Undoubtedly. Can you comprehend this? I allow him to love Miss Grafton, and yet, and yet he is unhappy, melancholy!"

"Good! it seems, then, that if you were not beloved by Miss Lucy Stewart, that you would console yourself—yes, you—by loving Miss Mary Grafton?"

"I do not say that; for, in the first place, you know that Mary Grafton does not love me. Now, I do not console myself for a lost love, but by a newly found one. But, in the second place, it is not I that am the point in question, but this young man. Would it not be thought that she whom he has left behind him is a Helen, a Helen before she knew Paris, be it understood."

"But, he is leaving some one, then, this gentleman?"

"That is to say, some one is leaving him."

"Poor youth! so much the worse."

"How mean you, so much the worse?"

"Yes; why then did he leave her?"
 "Do you believe that it was of his own free will he did so?"

"He was then compelled?"
 "By orders, my dear Stewart, he was ordered to leave Paris."

"And by whose order?"
 "Guess."
 "The king's?"
 "Precisely."
 "Ah! now you open my eyes."
 "Breathe not a word of it."

"You know that with regard to discretion, I am the equal of any man. Therefore, it was the king who sent him?"

"Yes."
 "And, during his absence, he takes his mistress?"

"Yes, and can you understand that the poor youth instead of feeling grateful to the king, bewails his fate?"

"Be grateful to the king because he deprives him of his mistress! Why, really, what you are saying, sire, is not in the slightest degree gallant towards women in general, and towards mistresses in particular, 'tis abominable!"

"But understand, will you, that if the woman whom the king deprives him of, were a Miss Grafton, or a Miss Stewart, I should be of his opinion too, and quite as much in despair as he is. But she is a little skinny limping girl. To the devil with such fidelity, as they say in France. To refuse one who is rich for one who is poor, one who loves him for one who deceives him—was ever the like seen?"

"Do you believe that Mary is seriously desirous of pleasing the Viscount, sire?"

"Yes, I do believe it."
 "Well then, the Viscount will soon be at home in England. Mary has a good head and she always succeeds when she sets her mind upon any thing."

"My dear Miss Stewart, have a care, if the Viscount has become reconciled to our country it is but lately, for only the day before yesterday he came to ask my permission to return to France."

"And you refused it?"
 "I believe so, indeed! the king, my brother, has too strong an interest in his remaining absent. As to myself, I feel my self-love is at stake. It shall not be said that I have in vain held out to this young man the sweetest bait that England had to offer."

"You are gallant, sire!" said Miss Stewart, with a charming pout.

"Oh! I do not include Miss Stewart, she is a royal bait, and if I have been caught by it, no other I trust will think of nibbling at it. I say then, in short, that I will not allow it to be said that I prevailed on one of the loveliest girls in the kingdom to look tenderly on this young man, and to no purpose. He shall remain with us, he shall marry among us, or may I be d——d."

"And I hope that when once he shall be married, instead of feeling ill-will towards your majesty, he will be grateful for it, for every one appears most anxious to please him; even to the Duke of Buckingham, who, and that is almost incredible, makes way for him."

"And even to Miss Stewart, who calls him a charming cavalier."

"Hark ye, sire, you have been lauding Miss Grafton to the skies, you ought in turn to allow me to indulge in a word or two, as to Bragelonne. But, apropos, sire, for sometime past you have been so kind hearted, that I am quite surprised at it. You are always thinking of the absent, you forgive all offences, you are almost perfect. Whence arises this?"

Charles II. laughed heartily.
 "It is because you allow me to love you," said he.

"There must be some other reason."
 "Egad! 'tis because I oblige my brother, Louis XIV."

"Give me another reason still."
 "Well, then, the true motive is, that Buckingham has strongly recommended this young man, and said to me 'I begin, sire, by renouncing Miss Grafton in favor of the Viscount de Bragelonne. Do as I do.'"

"Oh! the duke is indeed a most worthy nobleman."

"Ah! that's right—go on—be in ecstasies now with Buckingham. It appears that you intend to drive me mad to-day."

At that moment some one tapped at the door.

"Who is it that takes the liberty of disturbing me?" cried Charles, with much vehemence.

"In truth, sire," said Miss Stewart, this takes the liberty is so excessively pompous, that I must punish you for it."

And she herself opened the door.
 "Ah!" she exclaimed, "'tis the messenger from France."

"A messenger from France!" cried Charles: "from my sister, perhaps."

"Yes, sire," said the usher; "and a messenger extraordinary."

"Let him in, let him in!" said Charles.

The courier entered the room.

"Do you bring letters from the Duchess of Orleans?" inquired the king.

"Yes, sire," replied the courier; "and of so pressing a nature that I have only taken twenty-six hours to bring it to your majesty, notwithstanding that I was detained three quarters of an hour at Calais."

"Your zeal shall be remembered," said the king.

And he opened the despatch. Then bursting into a violent fit of laughter,

"In truth," cried he, "I cannot at all comprehend it."

And he read the letter a second time.

Miss Stewart affected a most reserved demeanor, and restrained her ardent curiosity.

"Francis," said the king to his valet, "see that this worthy fellow be well taken care of, and that he has a good bed. To-morrow morning when he wakes, let him find a small bag with fifty guineas in it on his pillow."

"Sire—"

"Go, my friend, go; my sister was perfectly right in recommending you to be speedy; the matter was very urgent."

And he laughed again and louder than before.

The messenger, the valet, and even Miss Stewart herself, knew not which way to look.

"Ah!" cried the king, throwing himself back in his arm chair; "and when I think that you must have killed—how many horses?"

"Two, sire."

"Killed two horses to bring me this great news!—Go, my friend, go!"

The courier left the room with the valet de chambre.

Charles II. went to the window, which he opened, and leaning out of it—

"Buckingham, my dear duke, Buckingham, come here, for Heaven's sake."

The duke hastened to obey the king's summons; but on reaching the door, and perceiving Miss Stewart, he hesitated.

"Come in, come in, duke, and shut the door."

The duke obeyed, and observing the king in such joyous humor, he advanced, smiling.

"Well, my dear duke, how stand matters between you and your Frenchman?"

"With regard to him, I am in utter despair, sire."

"And for what reason?"

"Because that adorable Miss Grafton wishes to marry him, and he will not consent."

"Why, this Frenchman must then be a perfect Beotian!" cried Miss Stewart; "let him say yes or no, at once, and so end the matter."

"But," gravely said Buckingham, "you know, or you ought to know, madam, that de Bragelonne has bestowed his heart in another quarter."

"Then," said the king, coming to the assistance of Miss Stewart, "nothing can be more simple, let him say no."

"But I have already proved to him that he ought to say, 'Yes.'"

"You, then, acknowledged to him that his la Valliers was deceiving him?"

"Yes, i'faith, and very plainly."

"And what did he?"

"He gave a spring as if he would at once have bounded across the channel."

"Oh! at last, then, he did something: that's very fortunate, upon my word!" said Miss Stewart, ironically.

"But," continued Buckingham, "I allayed this feverish ardor, and I left him tete-a-tete, with Miss Grafton; and now I hope he will not leave us, as was his manifest purpose."

"He manifested an intention to leave us?" cried the king.

"For a moment I doubted that any human power could prevent it; but Miss Grafton's eyes are levelled at him—he will remain."

"Well, in that, you are altogether mistaken," cried the king, laughing boisterously; "the unhappy youth is pre-destined."

"Predestined! and to what?"

"To be deceived; which, in itself, is nothing, but to see that he is so; and that is much."

"At a distance, and with the aid of Miss Grafton, the blow may be alleviated."

"Well, you are wrong again; there will neither be distance nor aid from Miss Grafton. Bragelonne will set out for Paris in an hour."

Buckingham started—Miss Stewart opened her eyes widely.

"But, sire, your majesty knows that this is impossible," said the duke.

"That is to say, my dear duke, it is now impossible that the contrary should happen."

"Sire, consider that this young man is a perfect lion."

"I will allow it, Villiers."

"And that his anger is terrific."

"I do not say it is not, my dear friend."

"Should he be an eye witness to his misfortune, so much the worse for the author of his *misfortune*."

"Be it so; but what would you have me do?"

"Even were it the king," cried Buckingham, "I would not answer for him."

"Oh! the king has mousquetaires to guard him," said Charles II. tranquilly, "I know something of that, I, who kicked my heels in his ante-chamber at Blois; he has Monsieur d'Artagnan. The deuce! there is a guard for you. I should not care a straw for the anger of twenty such as your Bragelonne, if I had four guardians like Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Oh! I trust that your majesty, you who are so kind hearted, will reflect," said Buckingham.

"Take this," said Charles II. presenting the letter he had just received to the duke, "and then say, what you would do were you in my place."

Buckingham slowly took the letter. It was in madame's hand writing; he read it, trembling with emotion.

"For your own sake, for my sake, for the honor and safety of all, send M. de Bragelonne back instantly to France.

"Your devoted sister,
HENRIETTA."

"What say you to that, Villiers?"

"In good faith, sire, I know not what to say," replied the duke perfectly astounded.

"Is it you, come now, tell me" said the king with affectation, "is it you who would advise me not to obey my sister, when she speaks so insistently?"

"Ah! no, no, sire, and yet——"

"You have not read the postscript, Villiers, it is under the fold, and it had in the first instance escaped my notice too. Read it."

The duke opened a fold which concealed this line.

"A thousand remembrances to those who love me."

The pallid face of the duke bent forward toward the ground; the letter trembled in his hand, as if the paper had been changed to molten lead

The king waited a short space and seeing that Buckingham remained mute.

"Let him then follow his destiny, as we do ours," continued the king, "every one has his cross to bear in this world. I have had mine. I have borne those of all my family. I have borne a double cross. To the deuce with all cares now. Go Villiers, go, and bring this gentleman to me."

The duke opened the trellised door of the cabinet and turning to the king, pointed to Raoul and Mary who were walking side by side.

"Oh! sire, what cruelty towards this poor Miss Grafton."

"Come, come, call him at once," said Charles II. knitting his black eyebrows. "Every body has become sentimental here, then? Good now, here is Miss Stewart who is also wiping her eyes. Confounded Frenchman!"

The duke called Raoul, and then taking Miss Grafton's hand he led her to a seat at the door of the king's cabinet.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," said Charles II. "did you not, the day before yesterday, ask of me permission to return to Paris?"

"Yes, sire," replied Raoul, whom this commencement confused for the first moment.

"Well, my dear Viscount, I think I then refused it."

"Yes, sire."

"And you were out of humor with me."

"No, sire, for your majesty doubtless, had excellent motives for refusing me. Your majesty is too wise and too good not to consider duly what you do."

"I alleged, I believe this reason, that the King of France had not recalled you."

"Yes, sire, you did in fact give me that answer."

"Well, I have since reflected, Monsieur de Bragelonne, that if the king did not fix any time for your return, he requested that I would make your sojourn in England agreeable to you; and since you asked to leave us it must be because your stay in England has not been agreeable to you."

"I did not say that, sire."

"No, but your request signified at least that another sojourn would be more agreeable to you than this."

At that moment, Raoul turned his head towards the door, against the framework of which Miss Grafton was leaning.

Her other arm was leaning upon that of Buckingham.

"You do not reply," continued the king, "the French proverb is positive on that head, 'who says not a word, consents.' Well, Monsieur de Bragelonne, I now find myself in a position to oblige; you may when it may please you return to France, I authorise you to do so."

"Sire!" cried Raoul.

"Oh!" murmured Mary, pressing Buckingham's arm.

"You can reach Dover this evening," continued Charles II, "it will be high water at two o'clock in the morning."

Raoul, altogether astounded, stammered out some few words, which were a sort of medium between thanks and excuses.

"I therefore bid you farewell, Monsieur de Bragelonne, and I wish you every sort of prosperity," said the king, rising. "You will do me the pleasure to keep this diamond in remembrance of me. I had destined it for a bridal present."

Miss Grafton appeared to be nearly fainting.

Raoul received the diamond; on receiving it, he felt his knees tremble beneath him. He addressed a few compliments to the king, some words to Miss Stewart, and looked around for Buckingham to say farewell to him.

The king took advantage of this to disappear.

Raoul found the duke occupied in raising the drooping courage of Miss Grafton.

"Tell him to stay, dear Miss Grafton, I entreat of you," murmured Buckingham.

"I shall tell him to go," said Miss Grafton, becoming more animated. "I am not one of those women who have more pride than heart. If he is beloved in France, let him return to France, and let him bless me for having advised him to there seek his happiness. If, on the contrary, he is no longer beloved, let him return to us; I shall still love him, and his misfortune will not have lessened him in my eyes. There is in the arms of our house that which God has engraved upon my heart—

"Habenti parsum, egentibus cunctia."

"Little to the rich, all to the poor."

"I doubt, my friend," said Buckingham, "that you will find in France the equivalent of that which you leave here."

"I believe, or at least I hope," re-

plied Raoul, with a gloomy air, "that those I love are worthy of me; but should it be true that my love is fixed on an unworthy object, as you have endeavored to impress upon me, my lord duke, I will tear it from my heart, even were I to tear my heart out with that love."

Mary Grafton raised her eyes to him with an expression of indefinable pity.

Raoul smiled sorrowfully.

"Miss Grafton," said he, "the diamond that the king has given me was destined to you; allow me to offer it to you; should I marry in France, you will send it to me; should I not marry, keep it."

And bowing to her after having respectfully pressed her ice-like hand, he hurriedly left her.

"What can he mean?" thought Buckingham.

Mary Grafton at once comprehended the look which Buckingham had fixed upon her.

"If this were a betrothal ring," she said, "I would not accept it."

"And yet you gave him permission to return to you?"

"Oh, duke!" cried the young girl, sobbing, "a woman, such as I am, is never taken as a consolation by a man like him."

"Then you are of opinion that he will not return?"

"Never!" said Miss Grafton, in a voice half suffocated by emotion.

"Well, then, I tell you that he will find, on arriving yonder, his happiness destroyed, his betrothed lost to him, his honor, even, sullied. What then will remain to him so precious as your love? Oh! tell me, Mary, you who so well know yourself."

Miss Grafton placed her fairy-like white hand on Buckingham's arm, and while Raoul was flying down the avenue of linden trees with wild rapidity, she repeated, in a dying voice, the line from Romeo and Juliet—

"He must be gone and live, or stay and die."

While she was uttering the last word, Raoul disappeared. Miss Grafton returned to her apartment pale and silent as a spectre.

Buckingham took advantage of the courier who had arrived with the letter to the king to write to Madame and to the Count de Guiche.

The king had spoken correctly; it was high water at two o'clock, and at that hour Raoul embarked at Dover for Calais.

CHAPTER CII.

TWO OLD FRIENDS.

WHILE all the frequenters of the court were thinking of the occurrences that had taken place there, a man repaired in a mysterious manner to the house situated behind the one on the place de Greve, with which we are already acquainted, from its having been the scene of the celebrated cutbreak, put down by d'Artagnan and Raoul.

The principal entrance to this house was from the Place Baudoyer.

The house was tolerably spacious, surrounded by gardens, and along the Rue Saint Jean was lined by shops, of edge-tool makers, which prevented any inquisitive persons from peeping into it, and was thus inclosed in a triple rampart of masonry, noise, and foliage, like a perfumed mummy in its triple case.

The man of whom we are speaking, walked with a firm step, although he was no longer young. On seeing his cloak, which was of a dark gray cloth, and his long sword, which raised the hinder part of his cloak, no one but would have imagined him a seeker of adventures; and could any one have studied his curling moustache, his fine smooth skin, which appeared beneath his wide-brimmed *sombrezo*, it would at once have been conceived that these adventures must be gallant ones.

And, indeed, the cavalier had scarcely entered the house when eight o'clock resounded from the clock of Saint Gervais. Ten minutes afterwards a lady, followed by an armed lackey, knocked at the same door, which an old woman immediately opened to her.

This lady raised her veil on entering the door. She was no longer a beauty, but was still a woman. She was no longer young, but active and of imposing carriage. She concealed beneath her rich attire, and which was in most perfect taste, an advanced age, which Ninon de l'Enclos could alone meet smilingly.

She had but just reached the vestibule when the cavalier, whose appearance we have but slightly sketched, advanced to meet her, holding out his hand to her.

"My dear duchess," said he, "good day to you."

"Good day to you, dear Aramis."

She was conducted to an elegantly furnished drawing room, whose high

windows were still purpled with the last rays of the setting sun, which, as it were, filtered through the upper branches of some dark fir trees.

They sat down side by side.

Neither the one nor the other thought of asking for lights, and thus enshrouded themselves in darkness, as if they mutually wished to enshroud their past lives in forgetfulness.

"Chevalier," said she, "you have not given me even a sign, that you were in existence since our interview at Fontainebleau, and I cannot but acknowledge that your presence at the interment of the Franciscan monk—I acknowledge that your initiation into certain secrets, have caused me the most lively astonishment that I have ever experienced in my life."

"I can explain to you my presence there—I can explain my initiation," said Aramis.

"But before entering into any other subject," eagerly rejoined the duchess, "let us speak a little of ourselves. We have long been good friends."

"Yes, madam, and should it please God, we will still be so, if not for a long time, at least, always."

"That is certain, chevalier, and my present visit is a proof of it."

"We have not now, duchess, the same interests we had in former days," replied Aramis, smiling without fear of its being observed in the darkness; for no one could have guessed that his smile was less frank and less agreeable than it was wont to be.

"But in these days, chevalier, we have other interests; each age brings with it its own; and as we now understand each other as well by conversing as we did, in former times, without saying a word to each other, let us converse."

"I am altogether at your orders, duchess. Ah! your pardon—pray tell me how you discovered my address, and for what purpose."

"For what purpose? I have already told you, that from curiosity I wished to know what you could have to do with that Franciscan, with whom I had business, and who died in so extraordinary a manner. You know that during our interview at Fontainebleau, at the foot of that grave which had been so lately dug, we were both of us much moved, and to such a degree that we confided nothing to each other."

"Yes, madam."

"Well! I had no sooner left you

than I repented. I have always been anxious to instruct myself. You know that Madame de Longueville is like me in that particular. Is she not?"

"I do not know," discreetly replied Aramis.

"I remembered then," continued the Duchess de Chevreuse, "that we had said nothing in that cemetery to you, as to what were your relations with that Franciscan, whose interment you had attended, nor I as to what mine had been. Therefore, this reserve appeared to me unworthy of two such good friends as ourselves, and I sought for an opportunity to see you, to give you a proof of my lasting friendship, and that Marie Michou, the poor dead girl, had left on earth a shadow of retentive memory."

Aramis bowed upon the hand of the duchess, and gallantly impressed a kiss upon it.

"You must have experienced some difficulty in finding me," he observed.

"Yes," said she, annoyed at being again brought back to that which Aramis wished to know; "but I knew that you were the friend of M. Fouquet; and I sought for you at M. Fouquet's house."

"The friend! Oh!" cried Aramis, "you are saying too much, madam. A poor priest, favored by that generous protector, a heart teeming with gratitude and fidelity; and that is all I am to M. Fouquet."

"Why, he made you a bishop?"

"Yes, duchess."

"Well, handsome mousquetaire, that is a retiring pension for you."

"As political intrigue is yours," thought Aramis, and then continued aloud "and so you made inquiries after me through M. Fouquet."

"And naturally enough. You had gone to Fontainebleau with him. You paid a short visit to your diocese, which is, I believe, Belle Isle?"

"Not at all, madam, not at all," replied Aramis; "my diocese is Vannes."

"It was that I had intended to say. I thought merely that Belle Isle mer—"

"Is a house belonging to M. Fouquet, and that is all."

"Ah! but I had been told that Belle Isle had been formed. Now as I know you to be a military genius, my dear friend—"

"I have unlearned all that, since I have belonged to the church," said Aramis, piqued.

"That suffices—I heard then that you had returned from Vannes, and I sent to one of our friends, the Count de la Fère—"

"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis.

"He is a discreet man; he replied to me that he was ignorant of your address."

"Always the same Athos," thought the bishop. "He who is good is always good."

"Then, you know that I cannot allow myself to be seen here and that the queen mother still entertains some prejudice against me."

"Oh! yes, and it surprises me."

"Ah! that is connected with all sorts of reasons. But let us not dwell upon that; the fact is that I am obliged to conceal myself; however, I very fortunately fell in with M. d'Artagnan, one of your old friends, is he not?"

"One of my present friends, duchess."

"He gave me the information I required, he sent me to M. de Baisemeaux, the governor of the Bastile."

Aramis shuddered, and his eyes flashed so vividly that he could not even, though it was near dark, conceal the vivid emotion from his clear-sighted friend.

"M. de Baisemeaux," said he, "and why did d'Artagnan send you to M. de Baisemeaux?"

"Oh! that I do not know."

"What can this mean?" said the bishop to himself, summoning up all his intellectual strength worthily to sustain the combat.

"M. de Baisemeaux was under obligations to you, as d'Artagnan told me."

"That is true."

"And the address of a creditor is as well known as that of a debtor."

"That is also true. Then Baisemeaux told you, you could find me—"

"At Saint Mandé, where I addressed my letter to you—"

"Which I have here, and which is precious to me," said to me, "since it is to it that I owe the pleasure of now seeing you."

The duchess, satisfied at having thus skimmed over the difficulties of this delicate explanation without mishap, breathed again.

Aramis could scarcely breathe at all.

"We were about to speak, I believe, of your visit to Baisemeaux," said he.

"No," said she, laughing; "farther back than that."

"Then it was with regard to your ill-will against the queen-mother."

"Farther back still," she rejoined; "farther back; it was with regard to the relations—"

"Which you had with the Franciscan," said Aramis, eagerly interrupting her: "well, I am listening with all attention."

"That is plain enough," rejoined the duchess, determining to let him have his way. "You know that I am living with M. de Laicques?"

"Yes, madam."

"A quasi-husband?"

"It is so said."

"At Brussels?"

"Yes."

"You know that my children have ruined and robbed me?"

"Ah! what wretchedness! duchess."

"It is frightful; it was necessary that I should tax my ingenuity in order to live, and, above all, not to merely vegetate."

"That can be readily conceived."

"I had hatreds to work upon, friendships to serve; I had no longer any credit—no protectors to favor me."

"You, who had protected and favored so many persons!" blandly said Aramis.

"It is always thus, chevalier. I at that time saw the king of Spain."

"Ah!"

"Who had just then appointed a general of the Jesuits, as it is customary."

"Ah! it is customary?"

"Did you not know that?"

"Pray, pardon me! I was absent."

"And, indeed, you could not but know that—you, who were in such great intimacy with the Franciscan."

"With the general of the Jesuits, do you mean to say?"

"Precisely. As I was saying, then, I saw the king of Spain. He wished to serve me, but he could not do so. He, however, gave me some recommendations to Flanders, and caused me to have a pension allotted to me upon the funds of the order."

"Of the Jesuits?"

"Yes. The general—that is to say, the Franciscan—was sent to me."

"That was well."

"And as, in order that my position should be properly defined—for, according to the statutes of the order, it was necessary that I should be considered as rendering it some services—you know that this is their rule?"

"I was ignorant of that."

Madame de Chevreuse paused to look at Aramis; but it had become dark night.—"Well, that is the rule," she rejoined, "and it was necessary that I should appear to be useful in some way I proposed to travel for the order, and I was, therefore, classed among the affiliated travellers. You understand? it was an appearance—a formality."

"Marvellously well."

"Then I received my pension, which was a very suitable one."

"Good heaven, duchess! what you have just told me is a dagger's blow to me. You reduced to the necessity of receiving a pension from the Jesuits!"

"No, chevalier; but from Spain."

"Ah! but for conscience sake, duchess, you will acknowledge that it is very nearly the same thing?"

"No, no; by no means."

"But, in short, of your handsome fortune, there must still remain—"

"There remains to me my estate of Dampierre, and that is all."

"Why, that itself is considerable."

"Yes; but Dampierre surcharged with debts; Dampierre hypothecated; Dampierre somewhat ruined, like its proprietor—"

"And the queen-mother sees all this with a tearless eye?" said Aramis, with an inquiring look, which, from the darkness, passed unobserved.

"Yes; she has forgotten every thing."

"You had, duchess, as I had thought, endeavored to regain her favor."

"Yes; but by a singularity for which there is no name, it happens that the little king inherits the antipathy which his dear father had conceived against me. 'Ah!' you will say to me, 'that I am one of those women who can be hated; I am no longer among the number of those who can be loved.'

"My dear duchess, let us hasten to revert to the object of your visit; for I believe that we can be useful to one another"

"I had imagined so. Well, then, I came to Fontainebleau with a two-fold object. In the first place, I was summoned there by the Franciscan whom you knew. By the by, how did you happen to know him; for I have told you my story, and you have not said a word of yours."

"I made his acquaintance in a very natural manner, duchess. I studied theology with him at Parma; we had been friends; but sometimes affairs, sometimes journeys, sometimes wars had separated us."

"You, well knew that he was general of the Jesuits?"

"I suspected it."

"But, tell me, by what strange chance did you happen to come to the same hotel in which the affiliated travellers were assembled?"

"Oh!" said Aramis, in a perfectly calm tone, "that was by mere accident. I went to Fontainebleau with M. Fouquet, to have an audience of the king. I was passing by there, and was altogether unknown: I saw upon the road the unfortunate dying man. You know the rest; he expired in my arms."

"Yes, but leaving you both in heaven and upon earth such great power, that in his name you issued sovereign orders."

"He did, in fact, charge me with some commissions."

"And with regard to me?"

"I told you that. To pay you twelve thousand livres, and I believe I gave you the signature required for receiving that amount. Did you not receive it?"

"Oh! yes, yes, certainly. Oh! my dear prelate you gave those orders, as I have been told, with so much mystery and such august majesty, that you were generally believed to be the successor of the defunct chief."

Aramis colored with impatience, the duchess continued.

"I made inquiries with regard to this of the King of Spain, and he cleared up my doubts upon this head. Every general of the Jesuits is nominated by him, and in conformity with the statutes of the order, must be a Spaniard. You are not a Spaniard, and you have not been nominated by the King of Spain."

The only answer Aramis made was these words;—

"You see then duchess, that you were in error, since the King of Spain told you that."

"Yes, dear Aramis, but there are other matters that I have thought of."

"What can they be?"

"You know that I think somewhat of every thing."

"Oh! that I know, duchess."

"You know the Spanish language."

"Every Frenchman who was engaged in the Fronde, understands Spanish."

"You have lived sometime in Flanders?"

"Three years."

"You have been to Madrid?"

"I lived there fifteen months."

"You have, therefore, the right of becoming a naturalized Spaniard, whenever you may wish to do so."

"Do you really think so?" said Aramis, with so much simplicity that the duchess was deceived.

"Undoubtedly. Two years residence and a knowledge of the language, are the indispensable requisites. You have three years and a half, which is fifteen months more than necessary."

"What are you aiming at, dear lady."

"At this. I am on good terms with the King of Spain—"

"And I," thought Aramis, "stand tolerably well with him."

"Would you like me," continued the duchess, "to ask the king to name you as successor to the Franciscan monk?"

"Oh! duchess."

"You are so already, perhaps," said she.

"No, on my word."

"Well, then, I may perhaps render you that service."

"Why have you not done this for M. Laicques, duchess? He is a man replete with talent, and whom you love."

"Yes, certes; but the thing was not thought of. But Laicques or not Laicques, answer me at once, do you desire I should do so?"

"No, duchess, I thank you."

She was for a moment silent.

"He is appointed," said she to herself.

"If you thus refuse me," pursued Madame de Chevreuse, "you do not embolden me to ask you any thing for myself."

"Oh! ask, ask on."

"Ask! I cannot do so, if you have not the power to grant to me."

"However little I may be able to grant, ask on."

"I stand in need of a sum of money to have my house at Dampierre repaired."

"Ah!" coldly replied Aramis, "'tis money that you want? Well, let us see, duchess, how much may it be?"

"Oh! a good round sum."

"So much the worse. You knew that I am not rich."

"Not you, but the order. If you had been the general—"

"You know that I am not the general."

"Then you have a friend who must be rich; M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet! Madam, he is more than half ruined."

"I had heard it whispered, but I would not believe it."

"And why, duchess?"

"Because I have some letters of the late Cardinal Mazarin, that is to say,

Léicques has them, which make out strange accounts."

"What accounts?"

"Why, with regard to the sale of public funds, of loans contracted, in fact I do not now remember, positively. But the import of it is that the superintendant, according to letters signed 'Mazarin,' had drawn some thirteen millions from the coffers of the State. It is a very serious matter."

Aramis dug his nails into the palms of his hand.

"What," said he, "you had letters of such a nature, and you did not communicate them to M. Fouquet?"

"Ah!" replied the duchess, "these are things which are reserves that one keeps carefully, and when the day of need arrives, they are brought out of their hiding place."

"And the day of need has come?"

"Yes, my dear Aramis."

"And you are going to show those letters to M. Fouquet?"

"I would rather speak to you regarding them."

"You must really be much in want of money, poor friend, to think of matters of such a nature, you who held the prose of M. Mazarin in such sorry estimation."

"I am, in fact, in want of money."

"And, besides," continued Aramis, very coldly, "you must have wounded your own feelings, greatly, when you resolved on having recourse to such a resource as this. It is a cruel one."

"Oh! if I had wished to have done harm and not good," replied the Duchess de Chevreuse "instead of asking the general of the order or M. Fouquet for the five hundred thousand livres of which I stand in need—"

Five hundred thousand livres!"

That is all. Do you consider that a large sum? It will require that amount, at least, to repair Dampierre."

"Yes, madam."

"I say, then, that instead of asking for that sum, I should have gone to my former friend, the queen-mother; the letters of her spouse, the Signor Mazarini, would have served as an introduction for me, and I should have asked her for this trifle, saying, 'Madam, I wish to have the honor of receiving you at Dampierre; permit me to have Dampierre put in repair.'"

Aramis did not offer a word in reply.

"Well," said she, "what are you thinking of?"

"I am making additions," replied Aramis.

"And M. Fouquet subtractions. As to me, I am endeavoring to multiply. What fine calculators we are, and how easily could we understand each other."

"Will you allow me to reflect a little?" said Aramis."

"No; after such an overture, and between people such as we are, the answer should be yes or no, and that at once."

"It is a snare," thought Aramis, "and it is impossible that Anne of Austria would listen to such a woman."

"Well!" said the duchess.

"Well, madam, I should be much surprised if M. Fouquet could dispose of five hundred thousand livres at the present time."

"We must, therefore, say not a word more about it, and Dampierre will repair itself as it can."

"Oh! you are not, I suppose, embarrassed to such a degree as that."

"No, I am never embarrassed."

"And the queen will certainly do for you," continued the bishop, "that which the superintendant cannot do."

"Oh! undoubtedly—but tell me, you would not, for instance, that I should, myself, speak to M. Fouquet of those letters."

"You will, in that respect, duchess, do all you please; but does M. Fouquet, or does he not, feel that he is guilty? If he be so, I know him to be proud enough not to acknowledge it; if he be not, he will be much offended by this threat."

"You always argue like an angel."

And the duchess rose from her chair.

"And thus you are going to denounce M. Fouquet to the queen?" said Aramis.

"Denounce!—oh, the horrid word! I shall not denounce, my dear friend; you are too well versed in politics not to know how such things are managed. I shall side with the party opposed to M. Fouquet, and that is all."

"That is a just definition."

"And in a party war a weapon is a weapon."

"Undoubtedly."

"When once I shall have reconciled matters with the queen mother, I may be dangerous."

"And it is your right, duchess."

"I will use it, too, my dear friend."

"You are not ignorant that M. Fouquet is on the best terms with the king of Spain."

"Oh! I can suppose that to be the case."

"Should you make a party war of it, M. Fouquet will make war on you in another way."

"Well, how can I help that?"

"And he will have the right, also, will he not?"

"Certainly."

"And as he is on good terms with Spain, he will use that friendship as a weapon."

"You mean to say that he will also be on good terms with the general of the order of Jesuits, my dear Aramis?"

"That may happen, duchess."

"And then the pension I receive from the order might be discontinued."

"I am very much afraid it might be so."

"Well, one must endeavor to reconcile one's self to it. Ah! my dear friend, after the Fronde, after being exiled, what can there be for Madame de Chevreuse to apprehend?"

"The pension, you know, is forty-eight thousand livres."

"Alas! I know that full well."

"And, moreover, whenever party wars are undertaken, you are aware that even the friends of the enemy are also attacked."

"Ah! you mean to say that they would fall upon poor Laicques."

"That is almost inevitable, duchess."

"Oh! his pension is only twelve thousand livres."

"Yes; but the king of Spain has some influence; and on being consulted by M. Fouquet, he might have M. Laicques shut up in some fortress."

"I have no great fear of that, my good friend, because, thanks to the reconciliation with Anne of Austria, I should succeed in getting France to demand the liberty of M. Laicques."

"That is true; but then you would have another thing to fear."

"What else can there be?" cried the duchess, affecting to be surprised and terrified.

"You will know, and you know already, that once affiliated to the order, it is difficult to withdraw from it. The secrets which have been acquired are unwholesome. They bear with them the seeds of misfortune to those who venture to reveal them."

The duchess reflected a moment.

"That is, indeed, more serious," she replied. "I will consider it."

And notwithstanding the perfect darkness of the room, Aramis felt a look, scathing as a red hot iron, escape

from the eyes of his dear friend, and dart straight to his heart.

"Let us recapitulate," said Aramis, who determined to be more upon his guard than ever, and slipped his hand under his doublet, beneath which he had a stiletto concealed.

"That is right; let us recapitulate: short accounts make long friends."

"The suppression of your pension—"

"Forty-eight thousand livres, and that of Laicques twelve, make, together, sixty thousand livres; that is what you mean to say, is it not?"

"Precisely; and I am seeking the counterpoise that you could find to that."

"Five hundred thousand livres that I shall have from the queen."

"Or which you may not get."

"I know a sure method for obtaining them," said the duchess, thoughtlessly.

These words made the chevalier's ears open widely. From the moment that his adversary had committed this great fault, his mind was so much upon its guard, that he continued to gaze upon her in the argument, and she, consequently, to lose the advantage.

"I will even admit that you may regain this money," he rejoined, "but you will lose double its value; for it will produce only thirty thousand livres a year, instead of the sixty thousand your pensions now are worth to you, and that during ten years."

"No; for I shall not be subjected to this diminution of my pension but during the administration of M. Fouquet; and I estimate its duration about two months."

"Ah!" cried Aramis.

"I am frank, as you perceive."

"I thank you, duchess; but you are wrong in supposing that after the disgrace of M. Fouquet, the order would resume the payment of your pension."

"I know the means of making the order continue its financial arrangements with me, as I do one for making the queen-mother contribute to my wants."

"Then, duchess, we are all compelled to strike our colors to you. The victory is yours—yours is the triumph! Be merciful, I beg of you.—Sound, trumpets, sound!"

"How can it be possible," said she, without paying any attention to the irony contained in the bishop's words, "that you should draw back for a miserable five hundred thousand livres,

when the question is to spare you—I mean to say, your friend—pardon me, I should have said, ‘your protector,’ from such a disagreeable event as a party war.”

“Duchess, these are my reasons; it is, that after paying you five hundred thousand livres, M. Laicques will ask his share, which will be five hundred thousand livres more, will it not?—and after Mr. Laicques’ share and your own, will come that of your children, your poor dependants, of all the world in fact; and that letters, however compromising they may be, can never be worth three or four millions. By heaven! duchess, the diamond tags of the queen of France are worth more than those rags signed Mazarin; and yet it did not cost one fourth the sum to recover them which you are asking for your self.”

“Ah! that is true! that is true! but the tradesman sets what price he pleases on his goods; it is for the buyer to purchase or refuse.”

“Come, now, duchess, would you wish to know my real reason for not purchasing your letters?”

“Say on.”

“Your Mazarin letters are forgeries.”

“Oh! you are jesting.”

“It cannot be otherwise; for it would, to say the least of it, be very strange, that, after having quarrelled with the queen, who was instigated to it by Mazarin, you should have kept up a private correspondence with the latter—that would smell strongly of passion, of espionage, of—in good faith, I cannot utter the word.”

“Oh, speak on.”

“We will call it complaisance.”

“All that is true; but that which is no less so, is what is written in the letter.”

“I swear to you, duchess, that you cannot make use of these letters with the queen.”

“Oh, but I can, though: I can make use of any thing with the queen.”

“Good!” thought Aramis; “sing, then, shrew; hiss, then, viper.”

But the duchess had said enough; she walked a step or two towards the door.

Aramis had a vexation in store for her—the imprecation which the slave utters when dragged behind the car of the conqueror.—He rang the bell.

Wax candles were instantly brought into the room.

The bishop was standing encircled by a flood of light, which shone full on

the emaciated countenance of the duchess.

Aramis fixed a long and ironical look upon those pallid and withered cheeks, upon those eyes which emitted threatening sparks, but from beneath eyelids bereft of lashes; upon that mouth whose lips carefully concealed teeth that were few and black.

He affected to assume a graceful attitude, advanced one of his still finely formed, and well nerved legs, bent forward his proud and intellectual head; he smiled, that she might perceive his teeth, which, by candle light, still had some brilliancy. The aged coquette at once comprehended the intention of the bantering gallant; she happened to be standing facing a magnificent looking-glass, in which all her decrepitude, so carefully concealed, appeared more manifest from the galling contrast.

Then, without even taking leave of Aramis, who bowed with as much supple and charming grace as the mousquetaire of former days, she left the room with a vacillating step, rendered heavier, even, by her precipitation.

Aramis glided like a zephyr over the tessellated floor to conduct her to the door. Madame de Chevreuse made a sign to her tall lackey, who took up his musketoon, and left that house in which two old and tender friends could not come to an understanding, because they understood each other but too well.

CHAPTER CIII.

IN WHICH IT IS SEEN THAT A BARGAIN WHICH CANNOT BE STRUCK WITH ONE MAY BE WITH THE OTHER.

IMMEDIATELY on leaving the house in the Place Baudoyer, the Duchess de Chevreuse was conducted to her own residence.

She no doubt feared that she would be followed, and thus endeavored to throw her followers, if there were any off the scent; but she had scarcely entered the hotel—she was scarcely certain that no one had followed to molest her—than she ordered the garden door, which opened into another street, to be unlocked, and directed her steps to the Rue Croix des Petits Champs, in which lived M. Colbert.

We have said that evening had closed in; it is night we now should say, and it was more than usually dark.

Paris, restored to calmness, hid in its indulgent shades the noble duchess, thus carrying on her political intrigue, and the plain citizeness, who, detained from home by a late supper, walked, hanging upon the arm of a lover, and chose the longest way in order to regain the conjugal abode.

Madame de Chevreuse was too well acquainted with nocturnal politics not to know that a minister never conceals himself, even in his own house, from young and lovely ladies, who fear the dust of public offices, or from old and very knowing ladies, who fear the indiscreet echoes of a minister's cabinet.

A valet received the duchess under the peristyle, and, we must say, received her very ungraciously. This man even explained to her, after having seen her face, that it was not at such an hour and at such an age, that people should disturb M. Colbert in his late labors.

But Madame de Chevreuse, without evincing any anger, tore from her tablets a leaf of paper, on which she wrote her name, a name which so frequently had disagreeably rung in the ears of Louis XIII. and of the great cardinal.

She wrote this name in the large and ignorant hand-writing of the great personages of that age, folded the paper in a manner which was peculiar to herself, and gave it to the valet without uttering a word, but with so imperious a mien, that the fellow, accustomed to guess at the quality of people, was at once impressed with her high rank, bowed his head, and ran to M. Colbert.

It is scarcely necessary to say, that the minister uttered a slight exclamation of surprise on opening the paper, and that this exclamation was sufficient to instruct the valet of the interest he felt in the mysterious visit, who instantly ran off to fetch the duchess.

She therefore, though rather heavily, ascended the first flight of stairs in the beautiful new house, paused some time on the landing place that she might not enter the room while out of breath, and then appeared before M. Colbert, who was himself holding one of the folding doors.

The duchess stopped on the threshold that she might well consider the person with whom she was about to treat.

At the first sight his round, heavy, dull-looking face, his bushy eyebrows, the disagreeable expression of his countenance, crushed, as it were, beneath a

cap similar to those worn by priests, his whole appearance, in fine, promised the duchess but little difficulty in her negotiations, but also little interest in the discussion of the articles; for there was no likelihood that so gross a nature would be sensible to the charms of refined vengeance, or thirsty ambition.

But when the duchess had advanced nearer to him, and observed his small piercing black eyes, the longitudinal furrow of his bulging forehead, the almost imperceptible crispation of those lips, which common observers generally thought good-natured, Madame de Chevreuse changed her opinion, and said to herself, "I have found my man."

"What is it, madam, that has procured me the honor of this visit?" inquired the intendant of finance.

"The need I have of you, sir," replied the duchess, "and that you have of me."

"I am happy, madam, to have heard the first part of your sentence; but as to the second—"

Madame de Chevreuse seated herself in the arm chair which Colbert had drawn forward for her.

"Monsieur Colbert, you are the Intendant of Finances."

"Yes, madam."

"And you aspire to become the superintendent?"

"Madam—"

"Do not deny it: it would only lengthen out our conversation, and that is useless."

"Yet, madam, whatever may be my good-will, my politeness, even, towards a lady of your merit, nothing could make me confess that I seek to supplant my superior."

"I did not talk to you of supplanting, Monsieur Colbert. Have I by accident uttered that word? I do not think I did. The word 'succeed,' is less aggressive, and more grammatically suitable, as M. Voiture used to say. What I pretend is, that you aspire to succeed M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet's fortune, madam, is one of a resisting nature. His lordship the Superintendent, plays, in this age, the Colossus of Rhodes: ships pass beneath him and do not overturn him."

"I should myself have made use of the comparison. Yes, Monsieur Fouquet plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; but I remember having heard related (it was, I believe, by M. Courart, the academician) that the Colossus of Rhodes, having been thrown down, the

merchant who had caused its fall—he was but a mere merchant, M. Colbert—loaded four hundred camels with its fragments; a merchant!—necessarily a man much less powerful than an Intendant of Finance.”

“Madam, I can assure you that I never will overthrow Monsieur Fouquet.”

“Well, then, Monsieur Colbert, since you seem obstinately bent on affecting this delicate sensibility before me, as if you had forgotten that I am called Madame de Chevreuse, and am old; that is to say, that you have to deal with a woman who has played at politics with the Cardinal de Richelieu, consequently, a woman who has no time to lose, as, I say, you commit this imprudence, I will at once leave you, and go in search of other persons who are more intelligent, and in greater haste to make their fortunes.”

“In what, madam, in what?”

“You give me but a sorry idea of the negotiators of the present times, sir; I can positively affirm to you, that if, in my day a woman had gone to M. de Cinq-Mars, and who was by no means a man of capacious understanding, I affirm to you that, had she said with regard to the cardinal what I am come to-day to say to you with regard to M. Fouquet, M. de Cinq-Mars would by this time have had his irons in the fire.”

“Come, madam, come, be a little more indulgent.”

“Then you consent to succeed to Monsieur Fouquet?”

“Should the king dismiss M. Fouquet, yes, certes.”

“That is another word too much; it is very evident that if you have not yet managed to get M. Fouquet dismissed, it has been because you have not been able to effect it; and I should also be but a sorry bungler, if on coming to you I did not bring you that which you require.”

“I am extremely sorry to insist,” said Colbert, who had allowed the duchess to sound the whole depth of his dissimulation, “but I must forewarn you, that, for the last six years, denunciation after denunciation against M. Fouquet have succeeded each other, without the superintendent being in the least harmed by them.”

“There is a time for all things, Monsieur Colbert. Those who made those denunciations bore not the name of Madame de Chevreuse, and they had

not proofs equivalent in value to six letters written by M. de Mazarin, proving the offence in question.”

“The offence?”

“The crime, if that suits you better.”

“A crime, and committed by M. Fouquet?”

“Merely that. Well now, this is extraordinary, M. Colbert! You, whose countenance is so impassable, I see you now completely radiant.”

“A crime!”

“I am delighted that it produces some effect upon you.”

“Ah! ’tis that the word contains so many meanings, madam.”

“It contains, Monsieur Colbert, a commission of Superintendent of Finance for you, and a letter of exile, or Bastille, for M. Fouquet.”

“You will pardon me, duchess, but it is almost impossible that M. Fouquet should be exiled; imprisoned or disgraced would be much.”

“Oh! I know what I am saying,” rejoined Madame de Chevreuse. “I do not live at so very great a distance out of Paris as not to know all that is passing here. The king does not like M. Fouquet, and he would willingly ruin him, should an opportunity be offered to him.”

“But the opportunity must be a very good one.”

“It is good enough; and therefore do I value the opportunity at five hundred thousand livres.”

“How so?” demanded Colbert.

“I mean to say, sir, that, holding this opportunity in my power, I will not transfer it into yours, but on the condition of receiving in return for it five hundred thousand livres.”

“Very well, madam, I understand; but since you have now fixed a price upon the sale, let us see the value of that which is to be sold.”

“Oh! that is very easily done. Six letters, as I have told you, from M. de Mazarin—autographs which cannot be considered as too dearly purchased, most assuredly if they prove in an indisputable manner that M. Fouquet has concealed large sums belonging to the state, to appropriate them to himself.”

“In an indisputable manner!” exclaimed Colbert, his eyes sparkling with joy.

“Indisputable! will you read the letters?”

“With all my heart! Of course you mean the copies.”

"Yes; that is understood."

The duchess drew from her bosom a small packet, which was flattened by the pressure of her velvet stays.

"Read them," she said.

Colbert eagerly grasped the packet, and seemed to devour its contents.

"Marvellously well!" said he.

"It is clear enough, is it not?"

"Yes, madame, yes. M. de Mazarin, it appears, delivered money to M. Fouquet, who retained that money. But to what amount?"

"Oh! that is the question—what amount. If we should come to an understanding, I will add to these six, a seventh letter, which will give you all the particulars."

Colbert reflected.

"And the originals of these letters?"

"A useless question. I might with as much reason say to you, 'M. Colbert, will the bags of money that you will give to me be full or empty?'"

"Very well, madam."

"Is it agreed?"

"By no means."

"How?"

"There is one thing on which we have neither of us reflected."

"Tell me what that is."

"M. Fouquet can only, under such circumstances, be ruined by an action brought against him."

"Yes."

"A public scandal?"

"Yes—what then?"

"Why, then, the action cannot be brought against him, nor can he be subjected to the scandal."

"And because?"

"Because he is the attorney-general of the parliament; because every thing in France, administrations, army, judges, commerce, are mutually united by a chain of good will, which is called the *esprit d'corps*; thus, madam, the parliament would never allow its chief to be dragged before a tribunal; never should he be dragged there by royal authority, never would he be condemned."

"Ah! be that as it may, it is no concern of mine."

"I know that, madam, but it concerns me, and diminishes the value of that which you have brought. Of what utility to me would be a proof of crime, without the possibility of condemnation?"

"Even if suspected only, M. Fouquet would lose his office of superintendent."

"That is a great matter, truly!"

cried Colbert, ironically, but whose gloomy features suddenly were lighted up with the vivid fire of hatred and of vengeance.

"Ah! ah! 'Monsieur Colbert,' said the duchess. 'pray excuse me; I did not know you were so very excitable. 'Tis well—very well! Then, as you require more than I can give you, we had better say no more of it.'"

"On the contrary, madam, let us still speak of it, only as your documents are lowered in value, you must lower your pretensions."

"You wish to haggle."

"It is a necessity to all who mean to pay faithfully."

"How much do you offer me?"

"Two hundred thousand livres."

The duchess laughed in his face; and then suddenly cried,—

"Wait a moment."

"You agree?"

"Not yet; I am thinking of another combination."

"What is it?"

"You shall give me three hundred thousand livres."

"Not at all, not at all."

"Oh! you must either take it or leave it; and, besides, that is not all."

"Something more! you are making matters impossible, duchess."

"Less so than you think. It is not money I am about to ask you now."

"What then?"

"A service;—you know that I have always tenderly loved the queen."

"Well?"

"Well, then, I desire to have an interview with her majesty."

"With the queen-mother?"

"Yes, Monsieur Colbert, with the queen. She is no longer a friend of mine, 'tis true, and that for many years; but she may still become so were she to find an opportunity."

"Her majesty no longer receives any one, madam; she suffers greatly. You are not ignorant that the attacks of her malady are now more frequently reiterated."

"And that is precisely why I wish to have an interview with her majesty. Perhaps you do not know that in Flanders these maladies are very common."

"What! cancers? They are a frightful, incurable malady."

"Do not believe that, Monsieur Colbert. The Flemish peasant is somewhat untaught and brutal. He has not a wife, but a female slave."

"Well, madam."

"Well, Monsieur Colbert, while he smokes his pipe his wife works: she draws water from the well; she loads the mule or the ass; she even carries loads on her own shoulders. Taking but little care of herself, she knocks herself against posts and pillars. She is often even beaten. A cancer is frequently occasioned by a contusion."

"That is true."

"The Flemish women, nevertheless, do not die from them. They go, when they are suffering too severely, to seek a remedy; and the Beguine Sisters at Bruges are admirable physicians for all diseases. They have precious waters, topics, specifics; they give the invalid a flask and a wax taper, make a profit on the taper, and serve God by dealing in these two species of merchandise. I will, therefore, take to the queen one of these prepared waters from the convent of the Beguines at Bruges. Her majesty will be cured, and she will burn as many tapers as she may consider due and proper. You see, Monsieur Colbert, that to prevent me from gaining access to the queen would be almost a regicidal crime."

"You are a woman of too much wit, duchess, you confound me; and yet, I can well imagine that this great charity towards the queen covers some trifling personal interest."

"And do I give myself the trouble to conceal it, Monsieur Colbert? You said, I believe, some trifling personal interest? Learn, then, that the interest is a very great one, and I will prove it to you by recapitulating my conditions. If you will obtain me access to her majesty, I will be satisfied with the three hundred thousand livres I have asked; if not, I keep my letters, unless you will pay me on delivery of them five hundred thousand livres."

And rising after uttering these decisive words, the duchess placed M. Colbert in a disagreeable perplexity.

To endeavor to haggle any farther had become impossible; and not to haggle was to lose too much.

"Madam," said he, "I shall have the pleasure of paying you three hundred thousand livres."

"Oh!" exclaimed the duchess.

"But how shall I obtain possession of the original letters?" rejoined Colbert.

"In the most simple manner imaginable, my dear Monsieur Colbert. To whom can you trust?"

The grave financier began to laugh, but silently, so that his shaggy black eyebrows rose to, and fell from, the deep wrinkle across his yellow forehead like the wings of a bat.

"To no body," said he.

"Oh! you will surely make an exception in your own favor, Monsieur Colbert."

"And how so, duchess?"

"I mean to say that if you would take the trouble to come with me to the place where the letters are, they would be delivered to you personally, and you could verify and examine them."

"That is true."

"In that case you will provide yourself with the three hundred thousand livres for I also trust to no body."

The intendant Colbert blushed to his very eyebrows. He was, like all men who are great geniuses in the art of figures, of insolent and mathematical probity.

"I will take with me, madam," said he, "the promised sum, in two orders, payable at my cash office. Will that satisfy you?"

"Why are not your orders for two millions, my good M. Intendant? I shall, therefore, have the honor of showing you the way."

"Permit me to order my horses to be put to."

"I have a carriage below, sir."

Colbert coughed, as a man who hesitates. He imagined for a moment that the proposal of the duchess was some snare, that perhaps some one was waiting at the door, and that she, whose secret had just been sold for three hundred thousand livres to Colbert, might have proposed to sell it to Fouquet for the same sum.

As he hesitated for a considerable time, the duchess, looking at him straight in the eyes, said,

"You would prefer your own carriage?"

"I acknowledge it."

"You are imagining that I am leading you into some trap?"

"My lady duchess, yours is a lively frolicsome disposition, and I, who am of a grave turn of mind, I might be compromised by any jest."

"Yes; in fact, you are afraid. Well, then, take your own carriage, as many of your lackies as you will—only, reflect maturely upon this—what we do, being but two, ourselves alone can know; what a third person may see, the whole world will acquire a know-

ledge of. After all, I have no feeling in the matter; my coach shall follow yours, and I shall hold myself satisfied by getting into your carriage, to go afterwards to the palace to see the queen."

"To see the queen!"

"What! have you already forgotten that? Can a matter of such importance to me so soon have escaped your memory? It was, undoubtedly, of little importance to you. If I had known this, I would have asked you double the amount for the letters."

"I have reflected, duchess; I will not accompany you."

"Really! and why not?"

"Because I have an unlimited confidence in you."

"You overwhelm me! But how am I to receive the three hundred thousand livres?"

"Here they are."

And the intendant hastily wrote a few words on a sheet of paper, which he handed to the duchess.

"You are paid," said he.

"The action is noble, M. Colbert, and I will reward you for it."

Saying these words she laughed.

The laugh of Madame de Chevreuse was a sinister murmur; every man who feels youth, faith, love, and life, beating within his bosom, would have preferred tears to this melancholy laugh.

The duchess opened the upper part of her dress, and drew from her bosom a small bundle of papers tied with a red ribbon. The hooks of her dress had yielded to the brutal strength of her nervous fingers. The skin, grazed by the extraction, and the rubbing of the papers, by which it was much reddened, was thus immodestly exposed to the eyes of the intendant, who was much amazed at these extraordinary preliminaries.

The duchess's hilarity continued.

"There," said she, "are the real letters of M. Mazarin. You have them, and, more than this, the Duchess de Chevreuse has undressed herself before you, as if you had been— But I will not mention names to you which might excite either your pride or your jealousy. Now, Monsieur Colbert," continued she, hooking and fastening the bosom of her dress with great rapidity, "the amorous portion of your adventure is concluded, so accompany me to the queen."

"That I cannot do, madam. Were

you again to incur the displeasure of her majesty, and it should be known at the palais royal that I had been your introducer, the queen would never, as long as she lives, forgive me. No. I have people at the palace who are devoted to me, and those will obtain admission for you without compromising me."

"Arrange it in any way you please provided I do get in."

"How did you say these religious ladies of Bruges, who cure these maladies, are called?"

"Beguines."

"You are a Beguine then."

"Be it so; but I do not intend to remain one."

"That is your affair."

"Your pardon—your pardon. I will not expose myself to being refused admittance."

"That is again essentially your own affair. I shall order the first valet de chambre of the gentleman on service in the queen mother's apartment, to allow a Beguine bearer of an efficacious remedy and which will alleviate her sufferings, to have access to her majesty. You will carry my letter, provide yourself with the remedy, and give the necessary explanations. I will acknowledge the Beguine, but altogether disavow Madame de Chevreuse."

"That shall be no obstacle."

"Here is your letter of introduction, madam."

CHAPTER CIV.

THE BEAR'S SKIN.

COLBERT gave the letter to the duchess, and gently drew away the chair behind which she had stood.

Madame de Chevreuse made a slight inclination and left the room.

Colbert, who had recognized the hand-writing of Mazarin, and counted the letters, rang the bell for his secretary, and desired him to go to the house of M. Vanel, the counsellor to Parliament, and request him to come to him immediately. The secretary replied, that the counsellor, faithful to his general practice, had just come into the house to give a report to the intendant of the principal details of the proceedings which had been going on during the day, in the sittings of the parliament.

Colbert drew nearer to the lamps, again read over the letters of the defunct cardinal, smiled several times on ascertaining the great importance of the documents, which Madame de Chevreuse had delivered to him, and burying his large head in his hands, he meditated profoundly for several minutes.

During these several minutes, a tall stout man, with high cheek bones, large staring eyes, and hooked nose, had come into Colbert's cabinet with a modest assurance, which gave evidence of a character which was at once supple and decided; supple towards the master who could throw him a bone, decided with the dogs who might have disputed with him the possession of his prey.

M. Vanel had a voluminous bundle of papers under his arm; he laid it upon the desk on which Colbert's elbows were leaning, steadying his head.

"Good day M. Vanel," said the latter, awakening from his reverie.

"Good day, my lord," said Vanel, in a natural tone.

"It is, sir, you should have said," gently replied Colbert.

"All ministers are called, my lord," with imperturbable self possession, "and you are a minister."

"Not yet."

"I call you my lord *de facto*, for you are my lord to me, and that suffices me. If it displeases you that I should call you so before all the world, let me address you so in private."

Colbert raised his head to a level with the lamps, and read or endeavored to read, in the features of Vanel, how much sincerity there was in these protestations of devotedness.

But the counsellor knew how to bear the weight of a look, even when the look was that of my lord.

Colbert sighed; he had read nothing in the inexpressive face of Vanel; Vanel might be honest. Colbert reflected that this inferior was superior to him, inasmuch as he had a faithless wife.

At the moment when he was compassionating the unhappy fate of the unfortunate counsellor, Vanel drew from his pocket a perfumed note, sealed with wax, and held it out to my lord.

"What is that?"

"A letter from my wife, my lord."

Colbert coughed. He took the letter, opened it, read its contents, and then put it into his pocket; while M. Vanel was quietly turning over the pages of the parliamentary proceedings.

"Vanel!" suddenly said the protector to the protegee "you are an assiduous man."

"Yes, my lord."

"Twelve hours work in your study do not alarm you."

"I work fifteen hours a day."

"Impossible! a counsellor cannot have more than three hours work for the parliament."

"Oh! I draw up statements for a friend whom I have in the accountant's office, and as I have time left, I study Hebrew."

"You are much esteemed by the parliament, Vanel."

"I believe, my lord, I am."

"You must not calculate on remaining long a counsellor."

"What can I do otherwise?"

"Buy an office."

"What office?"

"Something great. Petty ambition is the least easily satisfied."

"Small purses, my lord, are the most difficult to fill."

"And what office is there that you know of?" rejoined Colbert.

"I do not know of any, that is true."

"There is one, but a man ought to be the king to purchase it without inconveniencing himself. Now the king, I believe, would never take the fancy in his head to purchase the office of attorney-general for himself."

On hearing these words, Vanel fixed on Colbert a look which was at once firm and humble.

Colbert asked himself whether his motives had been divined, or whether the thoughts of this man and his own had accidentally jumped together.

"What are you saying to me, my lord," rejoined Vanel, "as to the office of attorney-general to the parliament. I know of no other than that of M. Fouquet."

"Precisely that, my dear counsellor."

"You do not show bad taste, my lord; but, before merchandise is bought, is it not necessary that it should be for sale?"

"I believe, Monsieur Vanel, that the office in question will shortly be for sale."

"For sale! M. Fouquet's office of attorney-general?"

"It is so said."

"The office which renders him inviolable, for sale. Oh! oh!"

And Vanel began to laugh.

"Would you be afraid to undertake that office?" asked Colbert gravely.

"Afraid! by no means."

"Have you no desire for it?"

"My lord is mocking me," replied Vanel; "how could you, think that a counsellor of Parliament would not desire to become attorney-general?"

"Then, M. Vanel, since I tell you that the office will be presented for sale—"

"My lord says so."

The report is current."

"I repeat that it is impossible. Never did a man throw away the shield, behind which he can defend his honor, his fortune, and his life."

"There are madmen, sometimes, who think themselves above all chances of misfortune."

"Yes, my lord; but those madmen do not go mad for the advantage of the poor Vanel there are in the world."

"And why not?"

"Because those Vanel are poor."

"It is true, that the office now filled by M. Fouquet may cost a good round sum. What could you give towards it, M. Vanel?"

"All I possess, my lord."

"Which means to say?"

"Three or four hundred thousand livres."

"And the office is worth?"

"A million and a half at the very lowest. I know people who have offered a million seven hundred thousand, and M. Fouquet would not agree to accept it. How should it happen that M. Fouquet wishes to sell it, which I do not believe, notwithstanding all that has been said to me about it."

"Ah! you have then heard something of it, and from whom?"

M. de Gourville, M. Pellisson; but vaguely."

"Well, then, supposing that M. Fouquet should wish to sell—"

"I could not even then be the purchaser, seeing that the superintendent would doubtless require ready money if he sold, and no one has a million and a half to throw down at once upon a table—"

Colbert here interrupted the counsellor by an imperative gesture. He had once more recommenced his serious meditations.

Observing the grave attitude of the master, observing his perseverance in bringing the conversation back to the same subject, M. Vanel waited for

a solution, without daring to provoke it.

"Explain to me clearly," at length said Colbert, "the privileges attached to the office of attorney-general."

"The right of indicting every French subject who is not a prince of the blood, that of nullifying any accusation directed against any Frenchman who is not king nor prince. An attorney-general is the right hand of the king, wherewith to strike the guilty; he is so, likewise, to extinguish the torch of justice. Thus M. Fouquet could maintain himself even against the king, by causing the parliament to raise against him; thus the king would be careful not to offend M. Fouquet, let what might happen, that he might have his edicts registered without opposition. An attorney-general may be either a very useful or a very dangerous instrument."

"Will you be the attorney-general, Vanel?" suddenly said Colbert, speaking and looking with more gentleness.

"Who? I?" exclaimed Vanel. "Why I had the honor but just now to explain to you that I do not possess funds enough for the purchase by at least eleven hundred thousand livres."

"You can borrow that amount from your friends."

"I have no friends who are richer than myself."

"An honest man!"

"If all the world, my lord, but thought as you do."

"I think so, that suffices; and, in case of need, would be responsible for you."

"Beware of the proverb, my lord!"

"What proverb?"

"He who is responsible, pays."

"Let not that hinder it."

Vanel jumped up from his chair, much moved by this offer, so suddenly, so unexpectedly made, by a man whose most frivolous words were considered as sure and binding.

"Do not mock at me, my lord, I beg of you," said he.

"Come, let us lose no time, Monsieur Vanel. You say that M. Gourville spoke to you of M. Fouquet's office."

"And M. Pellisson also."

"Officially or officiously."

"These were their words:—'These parliament people are ambitious and rich; they ought to club together to make up two or three millions for M. Fouquet, their protector, their light.'"

"And what said you?"

"I said, that for my part, I would give ten thousand livres if it were required."

"Ah! you are so much attached to M. Fouquet!" exclaimed Colbert, with a look full of hatred."

"No; but M. Fouquet is our attorney-general; he is overwhelmed with debt—drowning; we ought to save the honor of our body."

"And this it is that explains to me that M. Fouquet will always be safe and sound as long as he retains his office," replied Colbert.

"After I had said what I have told you," continued Vanel, "M. Gourville added, 'thus to bestow alms on M. Fouquet would be a humiliating proceeding, to which M. Fouquet would reply by a refusal. Let the parliament club together to purchase, in a dignified manner, the office of their attorney-general. Then all would be decorous, the honor of the whole body would be safe, and M. Fouquet's pride unscathed.'"

"That was an overture, assuredly."

"I so considered it, my lord."

"Well, then, Monsieur Vanel, you will go immediately to M. Gourville or M. Pelisson; but stay—do you know any other friend of M. Fouquet?"

"I am well acquainted with M. de Lafontaine."

"Lafontaine, the rhymist?"

"Precisely. He used to write verses on my wife when M. Fouquet was on friendly terms with us."

"Apply to him then to obtain an interview for you with the superintendent."

"Willingly—but the sum?"

"On the day, and at the appointed hour, Monsieur Vanel, you shall be provided with the money; do not be uneasy on that head."

"My lord! such munificence! You efface kings, you surpass M. Fouquet."

"One moment—let us not make an abuse of words. I am not giving you fourteen hundred thousand livres, Monsieur Vanel, I have children."

"Oh, my lord, you lend them to me! that is all I expect."

"I lend that sum to you, yes."

"Ask what interest, what guarantee you will, my lord; I am ready, and your desires being fulfilled, I will still repeat, that you surpass kings and M. Fouquet in munificence. Your conditions?"

"The reimbursement in eight years."

"Oh! certainly."

"A mortgage on the place itself."

"Perfectly well! is that all?"

"Wait a moment. I reserve to myself the right of repurchasing from you the office at an advance of one hundred and fifty thousand livres, should you not follow in the administration of this office a line of conduct conformable to the interests of the king and to my views."

"Ah! ah!" cried Vanel, somewhat agitated.

"Is there any thing in that to shock you, Monsieur Vanel?" coldly inquired Colbert.

"No, no!" eagerly replied Vanel.

"Well, then, we will sign the deed whenever it may suit you. Now run to see M. Fouquet's friends."

"I fly there."

"And obtain an interview with the superintendent."

"Yes, my lord."

"Be easy as to concessions."

"I will."

"And the arrangement once made—"

"I must hasten to get it signed."

"Take good heed not to do that; never speak to M. Fouquet of his signature, nor of forfeiture on retraction; nor ask him to pledge his word, do you understand? for you would then lose all."

"What, then, am I to do, my lord; this is too difficult."

"Endeavor only to get M. Fouquet to give you his hand upon it. Now, go!"

CHAPTER CV.

THE APARTMENT OF THE QUEEN-MOTHER.

THE queen-mother was in her bed-chamber at the palais royal with Madame de Motteville and the Senora Molina. The king, who had been expected all the afternoon, had not made his appearance. Having become impatient, the queen had several times sent to inquire after him.

The atmosphere of the court seemed to portend a storm. The courtiers and the ladies avoided each other in the ante-chambers; and the galleries that they might not speak on compromising subjects.

Monsieur had joined the king in the morning on a hunting party.

Madame remained in her own apartments, in ill humor with every body.

As to the queer mother, after hav-

ing said her prayers in Latin, she was chatting on household matters, with her two friends in pure Castilian.

Madame de Motteville, who had an admirable knowledge of that language, replied in French.

When the three ladies had exhausted all the formulas of dissimulation and politeness, they at length acknowledged that the conduct of the king was killing the queen with grief, as well as the queen-mother and all his relations, and they in good set terms fulminated all possible sorts of imprecations against Mademoiselle de la Vallière, when the queen-mother concluded these recriminations by these words, so expressive of her thoughts and of her character.

"*Estos hijos!*" said she to Molina.

That is to say, these children! a word of deep import in the mouth of any mother, a terrible word in that of a queen, who, like Anne, of Austria, concealed such extraordinary secrets within her saddened soul.

"Yes," replied Molina, "these children! for whom every mother sacrifices herself."

"To whom," rejoined the queen, "a mother has sacrificed every thing——" But she did not finish the sentence. It appeared to her when she raised her eyes to a full length portrait of the pallid Louis XIV. that his dim looking eyes were once more illuminated by a fierce light, and that his nostrils were distending with anger. The portrait appeared animated; it did not speak, but it threatened. A profound silence succeeded the last words of the queen. La Molina began rumaging among the ribbons and laces contained in a vast work basket. Madame de Motteville, surprised by the rapid flash which had simultaneously illuminated with intelligence the eyes of the confidant and her mistress, Madame de Motteville, we say, like a discreet woman, looked not at either of them, but, although she did not attempt to see, she listened with all her ears. But she only caught a significant hum from the Spanish duenna, who was circum-spection personified. She also overheard a sigh, but faint as a mere breath, exhaled from the queen's breast. She immediately raised her head.

"Are you in pain?" said she.

"No, Motteville, no; why should you think so?"

"Your majesty has moaned."

"You are right; for, in fact, I am suffering a little."

"Doctor Vallot is close at hand; he is, I believe, with Madame."

"With Madame! and for what?"

"Madame has her nervous attacks."

"A fine malady, truly. M. Vallot is wrong in thus going to visit Madame, when another physician would at once cure her."

Madame de Motteville again raised her eyes with surprise.

"Another physician than M. Vallot!" said she; "who can that be?"

"Occupation, Motteville, occupation. Ah! if any one is ill, it is my poor daughter, the queen."

"Your majesty also."

"Less so this evening."

"Do not be too confident, madam."

And, as it seemed, to justify this threat of Madame de Motteville, a sharp pain shot through the queen's heart, made her turn pale, and throw herself back in her arm chair with all the symptoms of a fainting fit."

"My drops," murmured she.

"*Pronto! pronto!*" replied la Molina, who, however, without quickening her step, went to a tortoise shell cabinet, inlaid with gold, and took from it a crystal bottle, and carried it, after taking out the stopper, to the queen.

The latter smelled at it several times, and murmured, "It is thus that the Lord will kill me. His holy will be done!"

"People do not die because they suffer," added la Molina, as she replaced the bottle in the cabinet.

"Your majesty is better now?" said Madame de Motteville, interrogatively.

"Much better."—And the queen placed her finger on her lips to enjoin her favorite not to say she had been ill.

"It is very strange!" said Madame de Motteville, after a pause.

"What is strange?" inquired the queen.

"Does your majesty remember the day on which this pain first attacked you?"

"I remember that it was a very mournful day, Motteville."

"That day had not always been a mournful day to your majesty."

"How so?"

"Because, madam, twenty-three years previously, his majesty, the reigning king, your glorious son, was born on that very day, and at the same hour."

The queen uttered a cry, leaned her head upon her hand, and remained wrapt in thought for several seconds.

Was this from a remembrance or

flection, or was it a fresh attack of the pain?

La Molina cast on Madame de Motteville a furious look, so much did it resemble a reproach; and the worthy lady not being able to comprehend in what she could have offended, was about to question her for the satisfaction of her own conscience, when suddenly Anne of Austria, rising from her chair—

"The 5th of September!" she exclaimed: "yes, my pain first seized me on the 5th of September. Great joy on the one day—great pain on the other. A great pain," she added, in a low tone, "the expiation of too great a joy."

And from that moment Anne of Austria, who seemed to have exhausted all her memory, every sense remained motionless, her eyes dim, her thoughts wandering, her hands hanging listlessly by her side.

"We must go to bed," said la Molina.

"Presently, Molina."

"Let us leave the queen," added the cautious Spanish woman.

Madame de Motteville rose from her chair; large brilliant tears, like those which children shed, were slowly coursing down the pallid cheeks of the queen.

Molina perceiving this, darted a look from her dark and vigilant eye at Anne of Austria.

"Yes, yes," suddenly rejoined the queen, "leave us; Motteville, go!"

That word "us," rang disagreeably in the ear of the French favorite. It signified that an exchange of secrets or of recollections was about to take place. It signified that there was one person too many to listen to the conversation, and at its most interesting point.

"Madam, will Molina suffice for the service of your majesty?" asked the French lady.

"Yes," replied the Spanish woman; and Madame de Motteville courtied, when an old Spanish waiting woman, dressed in the same manner as when she had come from Spain, in 1620, drew back the tapestry that hung over the door, and surprising the queen thus bathed in tears, Madame de Motteville in her sagacious retreat, and la Molina in her diplomatic manœuvre.

"The remedy! the remedy!" cried she, joyfully, to the queen, and going close up to the group without ceremony.

"What remedy, *chica*?" asked Anne of Austria.

"For your majesty's complaint," replied the latter.

"Who brings it?" eagerly inquired

Madame de Motteville: "Monsieur Vallot?"

"No: a lady from Flanders."

"A lady from Flanders—a Spanish lady?" demanded the queen.

"I do not know."

"And by whom has she been sent here?"

"Monsieur Colbert."

"Her name?"

"She did not give it."

"Her rank?"

"She will tell that."

"Her countenance?"

"She is masked."

"See her, Molina," cried the queen.

"That is useless," suddenly said a voice, at once firm and sweet, from the outer side of the tapestry which hung before the door, a voice which made the other ladies tremble and the queen shudder.

At the same moment, the curtains were drawn back, and a masked woman appeared between them.

Before the queen could speak:—

"I am a sister of the Beguine convent at Bruges," said the unknown, "and I am in fact the bearer of the remedy which is to cure your majesty."

All remained silent. The Beguine did not advance a step.

"Speak!" said the queen.

"When we shall be alone," replied the Beguine.

Anne of Austria made a sign to her attendants, and they retired.

The Beguine then advanced three steps towards the queen, and then respectfully courtesied to her.

The queen looked mistrustfully at this woman, who was gazing at her with eyes that shone brilliantly through the holes of her mask.

"The Queen of France is then very sick, indeed," said Anne of Austria, "since it is known at the Beguinage of Bruges that she requires to be cured."

"Your majesty, thank heaven! is not incurably ill."

"Tell me, in short, how do you know that I am suffering?"

"Your majesty has friends in Flanders."

"And these friends have sent you?"

"Yes, madam."

"Name them to me."

"Impossible, madam, and it would be useless, since the memory of your majesty has not been awakened by your heart."

Anne of Austria raised her head, endeavoring to discover beneath the

shadow of the mask and the mystery of these words, the name of the person who expressed herself with so much familiarity.

Then, suddenly, becoming fatigued by a curiosity which wounded all her habitual feelings of pride.

"Madam," said she, "you are, it appears, ignorant that no one speaks to royal personages with a mask upon thier face."

"Deign to excuse me, madam," humbly said the Beguine.

"I cannot excuse you, but, I can forgive you, if you throw aside your mask."

"It is a vow that I have made, madam, to go to the succor of persons who are afflicted or suffering, without ever allowing them to see my face. I might have given relief both to your body and your soul; but, since your majesty forbids me, I withdraw." Adieu, madam, adieu."

These words were pronounced with so much charming harmony and respect, that they at once disarmed the anger and the mistrust of the queen, without diminishing her curiosity.

"You are right," she said, "it befits not those who are suffering to disdain the consolations which God sends them. Speak, madam, may you be able, as you have just now said, to afford relief to my suffering body. Alas! I believe that God is about to put it to a cruel trial."

"Let us speak a little of the soul, if you please," said the Beguine, "of the soul, which I feel assured must also be suffering."

"The soul?"

"There are devouring cancers, the pulsations of which are invisible; those, queen, leave to the skin its ivory whiteness; they do not marble the flesh with their blue stains. The physician, who bends down over the chest of the invalid, hears not the muscles grating beneath the flowing blood, the insatiable tooth of these monsters. Never has iron, never has fire, killed or disarmed the rage of those mortal scourges. They inhabit the region of thought and corrupt it, they swell within the heart till they make it burst. That, madam, is another career fatal to queens. Do you not suffer from those evils also?"

Anne slowly raised her arm, her arm as brilliantly white and as pure in form, as in the days of her youth.

"The evils of a which you speak," said she, "are one of the conditions of the lives of those who are the great ones of this earth, to whom God has

given the charge of souls. These evils when they are too overpowering, the Lord alleviates, by giving us the tribunal of penitence. There we depose our burdens and our secrets. But do not forget that the same sovereign Lord measures the trials by the strength of his creatures, and my strength is not inferior to the burden laid upon me. For the secrets of others, I have faith enough in the discretion of God; for my own secrets, I have too little in that of my confessor."

"I find you courageous, as you have always been, against your enemies, madam; I do not find that you are confiding towards your friends."

"Queen's have no friends; if you have nothing more than this to say to me; if you feel yourself inspired by God as a prophetess, leave me for I fear the future."

"I should have thought," resolutely said the Beguine "that you would most fear the past."

She had no sooner uttered these words than the queen drawing herself up proudly, said in an imperious tone,

"Speak, then speak! Explain yourself clearly, quickly, completely, or if not—"

"Do not threaten, queen," replied the Beguine mildly, "I have come to you, full of respect and compassion; I have come at the request of a friend."

"Prove it then, and console of irritating."

"That I can do easily: and your majesty will see whether I come from a friend or not."

"Let us see."

"What misfortune has happened to your majesty within the last twenty-three years?"

"Why, great misfortunes. Have I not lost the king?"

"I speak not of that description of misfortune. I wish to ask you if, since the birth of the king, the indiscretion of a friend has caused your majesty any pain?"

"I do not comprehend you," said the queen, setting her teeth hard, to conceal her emotion.

"I will soon make myself understood. Your majesty will remember that the king was born on the 5th of September, 1438, at a quarter past eleven o'clock."

"Yes," stammered the queen.

"At half past twelve the Dauphin, already anointed by the bishop of Meaux, before the eyes of the king and before your eyes, was recognised as

heir to the crown of France. The king repaired to the chapel of the old chateau of St. Germain, to hear the *Te Deum*."

"All that is correct," murmured the queen.

"The birth of the king had taken place in the presence of the late *Monsieur*, of the princes, and ladies of the court. The king's physician, Bouvard, and the surgeon in ordinary, remained in the ante-chamber: your majesty fell asleep at three o'clock, and continued sleeping till about seven—was it not so?"

"Undoubtedly; but you are now relating to me that which all the world knows, as you and I do."

"I am now coming, madam, to that which but few persons know. Few persons, did I say? Alas! I may say, but two persons; for there were only five in other days; and during the last few years, the secret has been assured by the death of the principal participants. The king, our lord, sleeps with his fathers; the midwife, Peranne, closely followed after him; Laporte is already forgotten."

The queen opened her lips to reply; she found beneath the ice-cold hand on which her chin was resting, large drops of burning perspiration.

"It was eight o'clock," pursued the Beguine; "the king was supping, and with a glad heart; all around him was joy; loud hurrahs and foaming cups to the health of the new born; the people were bellowing forth their joy beneath the balconies; the Swiss, the mousquetaires, and the guards were in every part of the city carried in triumph by the inebriated students.

These formidable expressions of the public rejoicings made the young Dauphin, the future king of France, bewail in the arms of his governess, Madame de Hausac, whose eyes, when they should open, would perceive two crowns upon the tester of his cradle, suddenly your majesty uttered a piercing shriek, and dame Peranne again appeared at your bedside.

"The doctors were then supping in a distant part of the palace. The palace which had become deserted after having been so constantly invaded, had no longer guards nor order. The midwife, after having considered your majesty's state, cried out with surprise, and taking you in her arms, you, who were despairing, and with pain, sent Laporte

to tell the king, that her majesty the queen wished to see him in her room.

"La Porte, as you know, madam, was a man of great self-possession and good intellect. He did not approach the king like a terrified servant, who feels his importance, and wishes to terrify others; moreover, the intelligence was not alarming which the king was about to hear. At all events, Laporte appeared in the supper room with smiles upon his lips, and going behind the king's chair, said to him:

"Sire, the queen is very happy, and would be still more so, could she see your majesty."

"That day Louis XIV. would have given his crown to a beggar for a 'God save you!' Gay, light, eager, the king left the table, saying, in the tone which Henry IV. might have said it, 'Gentlemen, I am going to see my wife.'

"He reached your room, madam, at the moment when dame Peranne held out to him a second prince, handsome and strong as the first, saying to him:

"Sire, God will not allow that the kingdom of France should fall into the distaff."

"The king in his first impulse caught the child in his arms, and exclaimed, 'Thanks to thee, my God!'

The Beguine here paused, perceiving that the queen was suffering greatly. Anne of Austria, who had thrown herself back in her arm chair, her head leaning on one side, her eyes fixed, listened without hearing, and her lips convulsively agitated, either uttering a prayer to heaven, or an imprecation on the woman who thus tortured her.

"Ah! do not believe that if there is but one Dauphin in France," exclaimed the Beguine, "do not believe that if the queen has allowed this child to vegetate far from the throne, do not believe that she was an unnatural mother. Oh! no. There are persons who know how many bitter tears she has shed; there are persons who have been able to count the ardent kisses which she gave to the poor child in exchange for that life of misery and concealment to which reasons of state condemned the twin brother of Louis XIV."

"Oh, my God, my God!" feebly murmured the queen.

"It is known," hurriedly continued the Beguine, "that the king, seeing that he had two sons, both of them

equal in age and in pretensions, trembled for the safety of France—for the tranquillity of the state. It is known that the Cardinal de Richelieu, summoned by Louis XIII. for the purpose, remained a whole hour in his majesty's cabinet meditating upon it, and gave the following opinion:

"There is a king born to succeed his majesty. God has caused another to be born to succeed this first king; but at present we need only the first-born. Let us conceal the second from France, as God had concealed him from his parents themselves.

"One prince is peace, is security to the state: two competitors would bring civil war and anarchy."

The queen suddenly rose up, pale, and her hands clenched.

"You know too much," said she, in a hollow tone, "since you have touched upon state secrets—as to the friends from whom you hold this secret, they are base, false friends. You are their accomplice in the crime which has this day been accomplished. Now off with your mask, or I will have you arrested by the captain of my guards. Oh! this secret does not terrify me! you have drank it down—to me you shall restore it. From this moment neither this secret nor your life do any longer appertain to you."

Anne of Austria, adding gesture to her threats, advanced two steps towards the Beguine.

"Learn," said the latter, "to appreciate the fidelity, the honor and discretion of your abandoned friends."

And she cast from her the mask.

"Madame de Chevreuse!" exclaimed the queen.

"The only confidant of the secret with your majesty."

"Ah!" murmured Anne of Austria, "come and embrace me, dutchess! Alas! 'tis killing your friends thus to play upon their mortal grief."

And the queen, leaning her head on the shoulder of the old dutchess, let fall from her eyes a shower of bitter tears.

"How young you still are!" said the latter in a hollow tone: "you can still weep."

CHAPTER CVI.

TWO FRIENDS

THE queen looked proudly at Madame de Chevreuse.

"I believe," said she, "that you uttered the word 'happy,' when speaking of me. Up to the present moment, dutchess, I had thought it impossible that any human creature could be less happy than the queen of France."

"Madam, you have in fact been a mother of grief. But in conjunction with the illustrious miseries of which we have just now been speaking—we, old friends, separated by the wickedness of men—in conjunction, I say, with these royal misfortunes, you have joys, but little sensible, it is true; but which are much envied by persons of this world."

"And what are they?" bitterly demanded Anne of Austria. How is it possible that you can pronounce the word 'joy,' dutchess, you—who scarcely a minute since, recognised that I require remedies both for my body and my mind?"

Madame de Chevreuse reflected for a moment.

"At what a distance are kings from other men," murmured she.

"What mean you?"

"I mean to say that they are at such a distance from the vulgar herd, that they always forget that those beneath them who stand in need of the necessities of life. Like the inhabitant of the African mountain, who, in the midst of his verdant meadows, refreshed by rivulets fed by the snows that melt on the mountain top, cannot understand that the inhabitants of the plain below, dies of hunger and thirst, amid lands calcined by the sun."

The queen blushed slightly; she had comprehended the innuendo.

"Do you know," said she, "that it was wrong to have abandoned you."

"Oh, madam, the king it is said, inherited the hatred which his father bore me. The king would insist on my immediately leaving the Palais Royal did he know that I am here."

"I do not say that the king is favorably disposed towards you," replied the queen: "but I—I could secretly—"

The dutchess allowed a disdainful smile to rise to her lips, which made the queen feel somewhat agitated.

"Moreover," she added, hurriedly, "you have done well in coming here."

"I thank you, madam."

"Were it only to give us the satisfaction of contradicting the report of your death."

"It was, then, really said that I was dead?"

"By every one."

"And yet my children had not put on mourning for me."

"Ah! you know, duchess, that the court often travels. We but seldom see Messieurs de Luynes, and many things escape us amid the pre-occupations by which our lives are surrounded."

"Your majesty ought not to have given credit to the report of my death."

"And why not? Alas! we are all mortal. Do you not see that I, your younger sister, as you used formerly to call me, am already hastening towards the tomb?"

"If your majesty believed that I was dead, you must have been much astonished at not having heard from me."

"Death sometimes surprises us very suddenly, duchess."

"Oh, your majesty, souls burdened with such a secret as that we were just now speaking of, have always need to unbosom themselves; and this is a want which must be satisfied before the final departure. In the number of stages on the road to eternity, the putting of our papers in order is one."

The queen trembled.

"Your majesty," added the duchess, "will be informed of the day of my death, in a more positive manner."

"And how so?"

"Because your majesty would the next day receive, and under a quadruple envelope, all that still exists of our little mysterious correspondence of former days."

"Have you not burned those letters," cried Anne of Austria, with terror.

"Oh! your dear majesty," replied the duchess, "traitors alone burn a royal correspondence."

"Traitors!"

"Yes, undoubtedly, or rather I should say, they pretend to burn them, and put them by carefully, or sell them."

"Good heaven!"

"Faithful friends, on the contrary, bury such treasures, and then one day, they present themselves to their queen and say to her, madam, I am getting old, I am ill, there is danger of my dying, danger for the secret of your majesty. Take then this dangerous paper and burn it yourself."

"A dangerous paper—what can it be?"

"As to myself, it is true I have but one, but that one is very dangerous."

"Oh! duchess, tell me, tell me!"

"It is that note, dated on Tuesday

the 2nd of August, 1644, in which you recommend me to go to Noisy-le-Sec to see that dear unfortunate child. Those words 'dear unfortunate child,' are in your own hand writing, madam."

A profound silence ensued for some moments. The queen was sounding the depth of the abyss; Madame de Chevreuse was spreading her snare.

"Yes, unhappy, very unhappy," murmured Anne of Austria, "what a sorrowful existence did that poor child lead; merely to come to so cruel an end."

"Is he dead?" cried the duchess, eagerly, and with such intense curiosity that the queen believed it to be sincere.

"He died of consumption, died forgotten, died withered, as poor flowers given by a lover to his mistress, who allows them to fade away in a drawer, in order to conceal them from all the world." But, duchess, let us now speak a little of yourself."

"Of me? Oh! madam, do not cast your eyes so low as that."

"And why so? Are you not my oldest friend? Are you then offended with me, duchess?"

"Who, I? Good heaven! and from what motive? Should I have approached your majesty had I any cause to be offended?"

"Duchess, years are gaining fast upon us, we must draw closer to each other, and unite our strength to combat death which threatens us."

"Madam, you fill me with delight, with these kind words."

"No one has ever loved me, served me as you have done, duchess."

"Your majesty remembers it?"

"I shall ever do so. Duchess, give me a proof of friendship?"

"Ah! madam, my whole being belongs to your majesty."

"Come now, the proof."

"What proof?"

"Ask something of me."

"Ask—"

"Oh! I know that your soul is the most disinterested, the greatest, the most faithful—"

"Oh! do not praise me too much," cried the duchess, with some anxiety.

"I can never praise you as highly as you deserve."

"With age, with misfortunes, we change greatly, madam."

"G! I grant it may be so, duchess."

"What mean you?"

"Yes, the duchess of former days, the beautiful, the proud, the adored

Chevreuse, would ungratefully have replied to me; 'I will receive nothing from you.' Blessed, therefore, be the misfortune, if you have experienced it, since it will have changed you, and you will, perhaps, answer; 'I accept.'"

The duchess softened her look and her smile, she was charmed by the queen's manner, and did not conceal it.

"Speak, dear one," said the queen, "what is there that you wish?"

"'Tis necessary then to explain."

"Without hesitation."

"Well then, your majesty, can make me incomparably happy."

"Let us see, said the queen somewhat more coldly, from anxiety. "But you must remember, before all, my good Chevreuse, that I am now subjected to the will of a son, as I was, in former days, subjected to the will of a husband."

"I shall take care not to exact too much of you, dear queen."

"Call me, Anne, as in former times; it will be a sweet echo of our joyous youth."

"Be it so. Well then, my venerated mistress, beloved Anne—"

"Do you still speak Spanish?"

"As perfectly as ever."

"Then ask me what you wish for in Spanish."

"It is this: do me the honor to spend a few days with me at Dampierre."

"Is that all!" exclaimed the queen, perfectly stupefied.

"Yes."

"Nothing more than that?"

"Good Heaven! can you have imagined that I am not now asking you a most enormous boon? If it be thus, you no longer know me. Do you consent?"

"Yes, most heartily,"

"Oh! thanks, thanks!"

"And I shall be happy," said the queen, mistrustfully, "if my presence should in any way be useful to you."

"Useful!" exclaimed the duchess, laughing. "Oh! no, no, agreeable, sweet, delightful, yes, a thousand times, yes! It is, therefore, a promise?"

"It is sworn."

The duchess threw herself on the lovely hand of the queen, and covered it with kisses."

"She is, then, at heart, a worthy woman," thought the queen, "and—of a generous mind."

"Your majesty," rejoined the duch-

ess, "will consent to allow me a fortnight to prepare?"

"Yes, certes, but for what?"

"Because," replied the duchess, "knowing that I am in disgrace, no one would lend me the three hundred thousand livres which I stand in need of to repair Dampierre. But when it shall be known that it is to receive your majesty, all the funds in Paris will shower upon me."

"Ah!" exclaimed the queen, nodding her head intelligently. "Three hundred thousand livres! It will require three hundred thousand livres to repair Dampierre."

"Quite as much as that."

"And no one will lend that sum to you?"

"No one."

"I will lend it to you, duchess, if you wish it."

"Oh! I should not dare—"

"You would be wrong."

"Really?"

"On the word of a queen. Three hundred thousand livres is certainly not much."

"It is not—is it now?"

"No. Oh! I know full well that you have never set so high a price on your discretion as it deserved. Duchess just push that table to me, that I may write an order for you on M. Colbert—no, on M. Fouquet, who is much more the gentleman."

"Does he pay?"

"If he do not pay, I will; but it would be the first time that he refused me."

The queen wrote, gave the order to the duchess, and dismissed her after having gaily embraced her.

Having thus brought these intrigues of the Duchess de Chevreuse to a termination, and which will produce an astounding effect on the fate of several of the principal personages in this history, we are obliged to request our readers to "season their admiration for a while," promising them that in a short time we will give them the second series and final conclusion of the Iron Mask, which will be continued under the title of Louise de la Vallière a work which will be more absorbingly interesting than even the foregoing.

J. W.

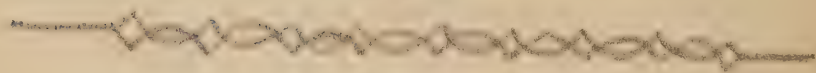
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